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BY WILLIAM H. MANNING.

THE CROOK DETECTIVE'S PULL;

Or, THE ROUND-ABOUT-TOWN FEMALE REPORTER.



"HO! HO!" HE EXCLAIMED, SHAKING BRONSON'S HAND, "YOU SLEEP LATE. THIS WON'T DO FOR A DETECTIVE."

The Crook Detective's Pull;

OR, THE

Round-About-Town Female Reporter.

BY WM. H. MANNING,

AUTHOR OF "STEVE STARR, THE DOCK DETECTIVE," "PLUNGER PETE," ETC.

CHAPTER I.

A MAN TO BE PUT OUT OF THE WAY.

CRIME leaves its imprint like a branding-iron, and a crime projected disturbs the even frame of mind of all but the most hardened.

Babe Brazer, keeper of the celebrated South street sailors' boarding-house, had seen too much of that phase of life to be moved by the addition of one dark deed to the list, but the woman who was with him on the night to which attention is now called, evil though she was, could not command so much composure.

"I wish they would come, so we could have this done with!" she sighed, nervously.

"Never mind the wait now; Tim will soon guide our man here, and then we will make short work of it!" replied Babe.

"Dead men tell no tales."

"The fellow we are to put out o' the way will tell none. I don't do my work by halves, an' you can rely upon it that this Paulus Andrews will disappear speedily an' forever."

"And then the gallows will threaten us."

"Stuff and nonsense!" exclaimed Babe.

"Don't get chicken-hearted. Is this the sort of a person Rod Stacey has sent here to see his job through?"

"I wish Rod was here to act for himself!" the woman declared. "Why need he take sick at such a time? This is man's work, not a woman's."

"See here!—be you goin' ter weaken?" roughly demanded Babe.

"Weaken? No! Most decidedly, no!"

"Then don't let us talk in such a strain. Tim will soon guide our man here, an' then we will dispose o' him as neat as you ever see a job done. I'm no chick, by gar!"

"Hush! Was not that the opening of the door?"

"Now you put a bridle on yer tongue. You'll see Tim bring the drunken chap in soon—you give Tim time, will ye?"

The speaker was growing savage of manner, and his companion let the subject drop. She might be nervous, but she was even more anxious to see the plot consummated than he was.

The time was night, and they were in a room where the gas flickered dully and gloomily on the rough walls of the room they made their waiting-place. The building was one fast going to see'd, but it was a source of good revenue to Babe Brazer. He ran it as a sailors' boarding-house, and in those days men who accommodated sailors had means of making money out of them which have since been curtailed in New York.

He had gained notoriety in his line of business. Sailors had often complained that they were robbed in his house—robbed, beaten and thrown out when their usefulness to him was ended; and from there they had, when occasion demanded, been carried on board ship, drugged and unconscious, and made to take voyages they never intended to take. Such was the boarding-house keeper's record, in part.

"Babe" was a sobriquet for the man, his real baptismal name having been lost sight of years before. Babe, in this case, conveyed the idea of irony. Personally, the keeper was a man six feet tall, and broad to correspond.

He was coarse and muscular of build, and ill-fitting clothes made his figure even less prepossessing. Long and powerful were his arms, wide his chest and heavy his shoulders, while his neck was little short of wonderful, so thick and big it was. Above the neck, however, there was a decided decrease in development. His head was very small, round and bullet-like, and it sat on his huge carcass as a mere apology for a head in more ways than one.

Not yet forty years of age, his jet black hair had no tinges of gray, and it stood up like quills on its narrow perch.

Babe might have been mistaken for a prize-fighter, as far as looks went, though even of that class few could show the predominance of brute over man as he did.

His companion was a tall, slender woman of good figure and graceful carriage. Little more could be told of her, for she was so closely veiled that her face was absolutely indistinguishable.

After Babe had rebuffed her, silence fell between them and several minutes passed uneventfully, but the keeper soon straightened himself and held up a warning finger.

"That's them!" he remarked, quietly, after a pause.

"Then we settle it soon."

"Yes."

"I dread to meet the man."

"Say, be you goin' inter heroics ag'in?" roughly demanded Babe. "I tell ye I'm dead tired o' yer funny biz, an' I don't want no more of it. Be sensible, or git out. See?"

"I object to your remarks, sir!" was the sharp retort. "I do not weaken, but I don't like to face him."

"You'll find him harmless enough. He has been fillin' up with whisky fer the whole afternoon—I know, fer Tim has had him in tow, an' I've took a look at them on the sly sev'ral times—an' now the whisky is down him he won't be dangerous. I drink whisky, myself, but I admit an' know it's a thing that makes a wise man a fool when he loads up with it. Ha! here they come!"

The door opened and two men entered.

One of the pair was a man after Babe's own model, though shorter and, perhaps, a little less muscular. He had the same ugly, ignorant, brutal face, and was a typical tough. His companion was a slender, fairly well-dressed man of some fifty-five years, and though his face was marked with more than age, he had considerable refinement and an unusual degree of intelligence pictured in his face.

He was now, however, stupidly drunk, and he kept his upright position only by holding to his companion's arm, and being upheld by it, too. Reeling and looking about him stupidly he faced the previous occupants of the room under the guidance of his companion.

"So you're here, Tim?" spoke Babe Brazer.

"Yes, an' here is the duck you wanted, too," answered the guide.

"Any trouble over him?"

"Not a bit."

"You've done well."

"He's plum' shot, though."

"It don't matter."

"Shall I take him right inter the room where we do him up?"

"Hush!"

"Oh! he's too fur gone ter heed w'ot I say."

Babe turned to the veiled woman.

"Shall we wind this right up?" he asked.

She started nervously. She had been looking feverishly, intently at the drunken man from behind her veil, and the breaking in upon her meditation caused her a shock. Recovering her coolness in a slight degree, she huskily replied:

"Are you sure this is he?"

"Why, of course."

"I would like to be sure."

"Ain't you sure now?"

"No doubt you are right, but I would hear it from his own lips. It is a serious thing to take a man's life"—this with subdued utterance—"and I want to be sure. Talk to him—get him to speak for himself, and speak his name."

"Bah!"

Babe was disgusted, but he was working to win promised money, and he yielded tamely.

"Cully," he began, addressing the drunken man, "how goes it wid ye?"

The gray-haired man lurched about in his effort to get his eyes and mind fully on his questioner, but Tim held him up. No reply came, however.

"Say, do yer want another drink?" asked Tim.

"No more!" interrupted Babe. "We can't waste it."

"He is stupid already," added the woman.

"Ask him his name."

Babe shook the marked man.

"Say, w'ot's yer name, cully?" he asked.

The drunken man muttered something about being a man of leisure, but there was nothing more, and no sign of intelligent comprehension. Babe continued his efforts, but without avail. He shook his man well, but even this did not rouse him.

"Let me try," requested the veiled woman. "Sir, is your name Paulus Andrews?"

No sign of comprehension, and nothing but random muttering.

All of the conspirators tried their luck, but it was useless. The brain of their prisoner was so dulled by the vile liquor that he was no more than a log.

"Missis, you'll hev to give it up," finally announced Babe. "We are jest wastin' time, an' we can't bring his jags around. See?"

"But I must be sure he is the right man," she declared nervously.

"He is."

"Can you prove it?"

"Tim," requested Babe, "sound yer bugle."

"Well, I follered him from the door o' the place where Andrews was said ter be stoppin', recognizing him from the description I had o' him, an' I picked him up, an' he ain't left my sight sence," Tim explained.

"Was he pointed out to you as Andrews?"

"No."

"Then this may not be he."

"What ef it ain't?" impatiently demanded Babe.

"I begin to realize that it is a serious thing to take a man's life, and I am not going to pe party to an unnecessary crime. I must have proof that this man is Paulus Andrews."

"Say, don't ye want a chromo wid it, too?" sarcastically inquired Babe.

"I simply want proof."

"Ain't ye got it?"

"I have not. It is very likely that you are right, but I am not sure of it. If I give the order for you to finish your work I become responsible for it all, and I won't go blindly. Drunken brute that this man is he does not even know his own name, and it will do us no good to learn it when he is dead. Human life is too sacred a thing to be trifled away—I must have proof that this is Paulus Andrews."

"Well, I'll be jiggered!" muttered Babe.

"Ditto!" growled Tim.

The two toughs looked at the veiled woman with supreme disgust expressed in every possible way.

"Can't you give me more convincing proof?" she added.

"Oh! you make me weary!" exclaimed Babe. "Who could give de exact proof but Rod Stacey?"

"Do not speak his name so loud."

"Well, you must see he is de only one who can prove anything, an' he is sick abed."

"So he is."

The veiled woman spoke slowly. She began to see how hard it would be to get the exact proof, and the doubt she had felt weakened. She had led a vicious career, and it was more the gloom of the rambling, slipshod old house, and the suspense of waiting, which had led her to hesitate to become party to a murder, new as this supreme step in crime would be to her. Now, remembrance of the facts mentioned by Babe hardened her heart. She believed that the person referred to as Rod Stacey could not come there, and that seemed to settle it.

She hesitated and watched the prisoner for awhile as he lurched around in efforts to keep his balance which would have been useless but for Tim's aid, and then abruptly added:

"Bring him closer to me, and hold the light where it will fall on his face. The gas is so dim I can see but little, and I would know how he really looks. Rodman has told me much of his looks—possibly I can set my doubts at rest."

Babe Brazer was thoroughly impatient, but this woman was the accredited representative of the man by whom he was employed, and it would not do to disobey her.

Besides the gas there was a kerosene lamp at one side, and he turned the low-drawn wick and added to the illumination.

"Trot the duck over," he directed, to Tim.

This plan was carried out, and the prisoner and the veiled woman were thus placed face to face. The sudden, strong glare in the man's eyes acted on him noticeably; he lost his sleepy look, his eyes opened fully, he cast off the drunken stupor for a moment, and thus stood before her more like a man than before.

Babe and Tim did not watch her face. If they had they might possibly have found something there to warn them of more trouble. As it was their only warning was an agitated exclamation:

"Merciful powers!"

And then she fell heavily to the floor.

CHAPTER II.

A MYSTERY ABOUT IT.

BABE BRAZER and Tim stared blankly. Accustomed to crime, destitute of nerve and unfeeling in all ways, they had planned to kill their prisoner with all the coolness in the world, but when the veiled woman dropped they were startled in a certain way. They stood still and stared at her.

She lay perfectly motionless like one dead.

"Say, why did she fall?" blankly asked Babe.

"Yes, an' why don't she get up?" added Tim.

The prisoner said nothing. He had recovered from the effects of the light, and the fall of the woman made no impression on him. Stupidly he swung around on his feet as before.

"By gar! I believe she has fainted!" declared Babe, finally seized with an inspiration of genius.

"Darned ef you ain't right!"

"What shall we do?"

"I don't know."

Neither of them knew. They stood and looked, wondering why she had swooned, and about as stupid as the man they had kidnapped.

Even an intelligent person might have wondered, but only as to primary cause, if he had watched the revelation of her face as she regarded the prisoner. Had such a gaze been on her, when Babe held the light close, it would have shown that the veiled woman had started nervously; then gained a look startled, surprised, uncertain and dismayed; that she had questioned that other face with eager, gleaming eyes, only to end by falling unconscious.

Deeply had she been moved, as if she had seen something familiar in the appearance of the prisoner, and this it was that had made her faint.

As she remained motionless the boarding-house keeper finally remembered that he had heard it said that water was used in such cases, and he obtained some of the fluid and proceeded to apply it to her face. Tim propped the prisoner up in a chair, and then gave his help to his companion.

After some minutes the veiled woman recovered, and, after a brief period of looking about, she struggled to her feet. Wildly she glanced around.

"Have you killed him?" she demanded.

"No. Don't ye see he is there?"

She did see. The object of her inquiry had promptly relapsed into slumber and was sitting with drooping head. She caught up the lamp and hastened to his side. This time the glare had no effect on him, and she looked long and searchingly. Every feature she seemed to scan with minutest attention, and her pale cheeks and agitated air told that she was moved by profound emotion.

Suddenly she turned upon Babe.

"Are you sure this is Paulus Andrews?" she demanded.

"Thunder an' lightnin'! ain't I answered that a dozen times already?" stormed the keeper.

"You say you can't give the proof. Then Rodman Stacey must be sent for."

"But you say he is sick abed."

"He must come out of his bed."

"Well, I'll be jiggered!"

"One of you men must go to Mr. Stacey, immediately, and send him here. I do not care to be going around the streets of New York at this hour too much, and, besides, I want to stay with—stay here."

"Say, w'ot do you see in the mug o' this feller that so excites ye, anyhow?"

"I am not excited," she replied; but her manner belied the words.

"Do you know him?"

"No."

"Then I reckon—"

"Will you go for Stacey?"

Babe had been curt and uncivil toward the veiled woman at the start, but he dared be no longer. Brute-like, he had imagined he could bully her because she was a woman, but he did not want to lose his work, and when she now came forth in the firmness of a strong will and imperious manner he gave way.

Tim O'Killen was sent on the errand named, and then began a long wait. Babe and the woman kept their places, while the prisoner slumbered in his chair.

It was an eventful pause in the contemplated crime. The lights flickered on the soiled and scarred walls, on the miserable furniture, and on the three persons there, and as the woman was one not accustomed to rough men or rough parts of the city, she did well to keep as much of composure as she did.

Once she went to the window and looked out. She could see the rude street with the masts of the vessels lying at their peirs just across the way—a long and striking line which told of the glory of New York's shipping industry—and, across the East River, the lights and spires of Brooklyn.

This woman had shown weakness during the night, but when the character of the street and of the house, and of Babe Brazer, in particular, was considered, one could not have refused to give her credit for remarkable courage, too.

The period of waiting grew long. Babe rarely looked at her, and he thus missed one feature of the hour—he did not see that her own gaze often strayed to the prisoner; that she studied his face ever and anon, and with mingled anxiety and uncertainty.

Something there confused and perplexed her.

At last there was the sound of footsteps below, and this was followed by the entrance of Tim O'Killen and another man. The latter was pale and, it seemed, weak, but he first of all sent an angry glance toward the veiled woman.

Babe rose with ponderous manner.

"Now that the sick have been routed from the hospital an' the morgue," he observed, "mebbe we kin go on."

"Daisy," exclaimed the new-comer, "what do you mean by asking me to come here?"

She pointed to the prisoner.

"Is that man Paulus Andrews?" she demanded.

"Certainly it is," he replied with a quick glance.

"Are you sure?"

"Yes."

"Will you look closely at him?"

"I have not come all this ways without the purpose of looking," was the surly answer, "but it is all a farce. I made sure of my position before I moved. My men knew their business, too."

"Go to him!"

She took the light and held it close to the prisoner's face, and the new-comer obeyed her request. His mind was still on other matters, however, and he grumbled:

"I was too sick by far to come out, and all this has proved a loss of time and strength. I really thought from the fuss you made that you might have run upon some error, but there is none. They say you fainted. Why was that?"

If there was a hidden reason he did not learn what it was.

"When we had the man here," she responded, "it occurred to me that there might be some mistake, and human life is too valuable to be thrown away thus."

"You have grown conscientious all of a sudden."

"Rodman Stacey, I am a woman of evil life, but I have never had a hand in murder before. I took part in this to please you. Are you not satisfied? Do you want me to leave here at once?"

The suggestion startled Stacey. It would never do to offend an ally who knew so much.

"My dear girl!" he cried, "of course I

do not. Don't get such an idea into your head, for it is wholly uncalled for. Of course I was a bit annoyed at being called out of bed when I was sick, but I reckon it will not do me any harm. You are quite right in wanting to be sure about all this."

"Rodman, are you sure this is Paulus Andrews?"

"Yes."

"You knew him well, did you?"

"Why, as well as I do you."

"Enough, then. All I cared for was to be certain. It is all right if you are certain, but—"

Again her gaze strayed to the prisoner; again she looked puzzled and worried.

Stacey did not notice this new evidence of a mystery in the case. He had turned to Babe Brazer, and he inquired:

"Has there been any trouble?"

"No," replied the keeper of the house.

"No police watching?"

"No."

"Are you all ready to do the work?"

"Yes."

"Then the sooner you do it, the better; but, first, get me a drink of whisky. I feel faint, and as if I might repent this coming out with more of sickness. I want to ward it off with a drink. Is the man unconscious?"

"Yes, he's dead-drunk."

"Then do you and Tim go down with me, and we'll all have something together. It will brace you up for the work you have to do."

"We don't need nothin' fer that purpose, but I never refuse ter be decent with a gent," replied Babe. "We will hev a pull with ye."

"Come, Daisy!"

Stacey took the woman's arm, and as he led her out the other two men followed. Paulus Andrews was left sitting alone in the room, apparently unconscious and incapable of being roused.

The veiled woman had gone with visible reluctance, and even when outside the room she did not show the courage which she really had. Her words of remonstrance, however, were spoken, and she went in silence.

Babe led the way to his bar room, and there set out a whisky bottle. It was a liquid with which Daisy was no stranger, and she emptied a glass as full as those swallowed by the men. Everybody but her had a jest to make, regardless of the man they had that night doomed to death, and, though Stacey was of a very different rank in life from that filled by Babe and Tim, his cool unconcern told of villainy just as pronounced as theirs.

Presently Babe turned suddenly to Tim.

"Go up and watch the gent in the room above," he directed.

Tim went, and the rest proceeded to have another glass leisurely.

"I want to compliment you on the way you've done this job," approvingly remarked Stacey. "It was neat, and we can feel sure of—"

Tim came bounding down the stairs.

"Say," he cried, while yet short of the room, "that feller is gone!"

"Gone!" gasped Babe.

"The room is empty, an' he's escaped or been helped off!"

CHAPTER III.

THE TRAGEDY OF THE HOUSE-TOP.

A YOUNG woman was passing along one of the streets in the lower part of the City of New York. She was a good deal of a novelty there, for she was well dressed, and women like her rarely greeted the eye in that section. She, however, had none of the hesitating manner which usually marks the lady who penetrates to places where she feels ill at ease.

This woman did not seem ill at ease in any degree. Her manner was modest and lady-like, yet it was thoroughly business like, and she appeared to feel that she could take care of herself without trouble.

She was about twenty-five years old, one would say, and her movements had the alertness of health, energy and resolution—yet she was so free from anything like brazen confidence that any observer must give her credit

for the instincts and outward acts that go to mark the lady.

The time was the forenoon after the scenes of the previous chapters.

As she progressed a slight sound caused her to look up, and she saw men on the roof of a building at one side of the street. Some of them were talking and gesticulating in a way that made her quick steps grow slower.

"They seem to be agitated over something," she thought. "I wonder what it is."

There were reasons why she wished to know, and her gaze strayed to the door of the house on which they stood. There she saw a girl of about twelve years who stood on the threshold, looking up and down the street in a perturbed way. The young lady hastened to her side.

"Do you live here?" she inquired abruptly.

"Why, yes," was the answer; "I'm Lil the Lamplighter."

Evidently it was expected that this would convey meaning, but the inquirer had never heard of her. She simply proceeded:

"What are all these men doing on the roof?"

"They're with the dead man," was the matter-of-fact reply.

"The dead man?"

"Yes."

"What dead man?"

"We don't know his name, but he's the one who has been murdered."

"Murdered? A man murdered there?"

"Yes'm."

The young lady stood in silence, but she was clearly doing a good deal of thinking. Lil the Lamplighter watched her for a moment, and then again glanced down the street.

"Tony Wageline, the detective, has been here," she added, "but he went away for a minute—shouldn't wonder if it was ter get a drink—and they are looking fer him to come back. A policeman has charge up there now."

"Can I go up?" suddenly asked the young lady.

"Yes, an' I wish you would. I want ter go, but it sorter gives me a creepy feelin' to see him."

"Is—is the sight so very bad?"

"Oh! only that he's dead. There ain't no blood."

"Show me the way up."

Lil evinced her approval of this idea by turning promptly, and under this escort the inquirer went. She did not cease her questions.

"Who killed the man?"

"Nobody knows, yet."

"Did he belong near here?"

"Nobody knows that; he ain't been recognized, ye see."

"Was he killed on the roof?"

"I s'pose so."

"Tell me more, please."

"Well, ye see I live here with John Maines. He's kinder my father, an' he's a lamplighter, but he's powerful bad with the roomatiz most o' the time, an' when he is so I light 'em up. He went on the roof jest a little while ago, an' he found the body there. He sent me ter call a policeman, an' I did so. Tony Wageline was around, an' he come too. That's all there is to it."

By this time they were near the roof. Only the steep, rickety ladder which connected with the skylight stopped them, and this was soon climbed. Laboriously the young woman drew herself up—then she had the whole scene at her disposal, as far as eyesight went.

She saw three ragged men, a blue-coated policeman and—the fifth figure was prostrate. Stretched on the rough, flat surface was a still, silent form. A pale face was upturned, and she who saw it for the first time did not need to be told that the seal of death was seen in the pallor.

She stood silent, for a moment, awed and shocked, but the fact that all of the living men were gazing fixedly at her brought out her latent courage. She went further forward, pausing near the policeman. He watched her as she gazed at the dead, and then suddenly inquired:

"Do you identify him?"

She started, and then seemed to make an effort to be calm and business-like.

"Unfortunately, I do not."

"Who did you think he might be?"

"It did not occur to me that I might know him."

"Oh!"

The officer turned his back with an air somewhat disdainful. He set her down as a mere curiosity-seeker, and dropped her then and there, as far as he was concerned.

"Has nothing been learned of this man?" she asked.

As the officer did not deign to reply, another man, who proved to be the John Maines mentioned by Lil, responded:

"No, miss."

"He did not live in this house, did he?"

"No."

"How about the adjoining houses?"

"Nor there, either."

"Do you think he was killed on the roof?"

"That is what we don't know, either. No marks tell us so fur ef he was or not."

"He was evidently a dissipated man."

"He looks so."

"Yet, he had an intelligent face, and clearly came from a rank in life by no means low."

The policeman gave a contemptuous sniff. He did not like this young woman, who was better dressed than he could afford to be in private life, and when she began to talk of social classes he was seized with the notion that she would probably feel herself above him.

At that moment there was another arrival. A tall, lank person had appeared on the roof, and Lil pulled at the young woman's dress and whispered:

"That is Tony Wageline, the detective."

The young woman turned quickly. She was disappointed in what she saw. She had hoped to find a man who would be her friend, in a certain degree, but she did not like Tony. He had a face which did not recommend him, if she read aright.

Now, he returned her regard sharply, and then inquired:

"Who is all this?"

The policeman took his cue from the dissatisfaction expressed in the detective's voice, and curtly answered:

"Both the females are here to satisfy abnormal curiosity."

"We ain't got any room for such folks!" roughly asserted Wageline. "Go down off this roof!"

Lil began to move, but the young woman stood her ground.

"Excuse me, but I am not here out of idle curiosity—"

"Did you know the dead man?"

"No, but I—"

"Then get out of our way. We can't be worried by meddlesome women."

"If you will allow me to explain—"

"I told you to get out!"

Either Wageline was a brute, or else he was in a mood unusually peevish just then. Be that as it might, he seized the young woman roughly by the arm and began to force her toward the place of descent. Then he had a shock in return.

"Stop!" ordered a firm voice.

Mr. Wageline mechanically obeyed. He saw a man who had, it seemed, followed him up, and this man looked grim and determined just then.

"That lady," added the stranger, calmly, "is trying to release her arm from your hold. Oblige her and me by letting go!"

"Say, who are you that interferes here?" demanded the detective, warmly.

"If you want my name, it is Essex Bronson. Further than that, I am nobody in particular."

"Then how dare you meddle with me?"

"Simply because I do not intend to stand idle and see you use violence toward a lady. I presume you have authority to clear the roof, and I do not for a moment object if you do it properly, but I say again that I shall not allow you to forget that civility is due to ladies."

Evidently, Mr. Bronson was not afraid to assert his views. As far as muscle went this seemed natural, for he was abundantly supplied with strength, but his bold stand made Wageline regard him with wonder which bade fair to run into rage.

The young woman saw that she was go-

ing to get her champion into difficulty unless she spoke at once, and she broke in quickly:

"I have been trying to make an explanation, and will do so now if I am permitted. I am not here out of idle curiosity, but I am a reporter on the staff of the *Daily*—"

She named a newspaper so well known and so influential that Wageline speedily recovered prudence. Reporters he never of fended if he could help it, for various reasons, and though this was his first experience with women reporters, he knew that women had entered the calling named, and he did not doubt that he had met one of them, at last.

Promptly he changed his course of action.

"Miss, I beg your pardon, but I never suspected it. You see, I didn't know that—that young ladies were sent to do work like this—on murder cases, I mean."

"I was not sent, sir. I merely happened to be passing, and I ventured to come up here. This is out of my usual line of duty, yet I am a reporter."

"Then you can make as free as you wish. You are quite welcome, I assure you."

Detective Wageline was profuse with his words, but Essex Bronson regarded the lady with great curiosity. Women reporters were new in his experience, too, and he was not a little interested.

A forward movement of all toward the body caused Bronson to make an advance in the same direction, and he thus gained view of the still face. When he did so he gave a start, his eyes opened wide, and something like consternation appeared in his expression.

"Great heavens!" he exclaimed, "I know this man! Is it here I find him?—here, and dead? What an unspeakable calamity!"

CHAPTER IV.

A MYSTERY, DEAD AND ALIVE.

Essex Bronson became at once the focus of all gazes, though Detective Wageline and the woman reporter bent the keenest regards upon him.

"What's that?" demanded Wageline.

"I knew this man," repeated Bronson.

"Well, that's great. Who was he?"

"If he gave me the right name, and I do not have any known reason for doubting it, he was named Paulus Andrews."

"Where did he live?"

"He arrived in New York but two days since."

"From where?"

"Mexico."

"Was he a Mexican?"

"No, but he had been in that country for some time—I do not know how long. I have been traveling for years, myself, and I sailed from Mexico on the same steamer with Mr. Andrews. Naturally, we became acquainted."

"Had he friends here?"

"That I can't answer directly. He had acquaintances, and, I think, relatives, but I do not think he was expecting to go to a home, or to relatives who would give him warm welcome. He was reserved, and I learned practically nothing of his private affairs."

Thus far Essex had been looking at the dead man, as well as talking, but he shifted his gaze and saw the woman reporter busily writing. Clearly, she had her mind on business.

Essex had not yet seen his twenty-eighth year, and he had the ways and thoughts of young men. Now, seeing that she was young, also, she became an object of interest to him, not only for that reason but because of her calling. He had been in foreign lands for several years, and, consequently, had not fully kept pace with the development of the cause of women as applied to their efforts to earn their living.

It was a complete novelty to him to see a woman reporter, whether in a murder case or the more peaceful walks of life usually allotted to the sex who were connected with newspapers.

Thus, he looked in wonder tempered with gentlemanly respect for her as a woman—looked, wondered, admired. For she was pretty, and beauty is a lever of power.

Tony Wageline was zealous, and, having

learned what he could from Bronson, he tried to discover something which would tell more of the crime, itself.

He searched the adjacent roofs, but could get no light. Then he returned to his companions and, addressing John Maines, renewed a conversation he had begun before the woman reporter appeared on the scene.

"You are sure the man did not live here?" he asked.

"Yes, and didn't this gent say he had just come in on a steamer?"

"Two days ago, but that was not what I inquired. All of the regular dwellers in the house say he did not stop with them, last night. Now, could he have come here unseen by anybody?"

"Doubtful," returned Maines.

"If he had, could he have come up through the scuttle?"

"Ef he got ter the attic he could, of course, but I don't reckon he got ter the attic."

"Then he came from the roof of some other house, but I don't see what one, yet."

"Hadn't you better inquire—"

"Allow me to conduct this case, will you?" demanded Wageline, sharply.

"Of course," meekly agreed Maines.

"Do so."

The woman reporter put away her notes and started for the scuttle. Essex Bronson accosted her politely.

"Pardon me, but are you going to leave us now?" he asked.

"I am going to the office to turn in my discovery," she calmly replied.

"If you do not object I will go down also."

"I cannot very well prevent it if I would," she remarked, her businesslike air giving place to a pleasant smile. "Of course there is no objection."

They descended to the street. There Bronson resumed.

"May I ask, Miss— On the whole I think I have not heard your name," he added, politely.

She hesitated for a moment, and then answered:

"It is Minola Alden. Of course that is a private affair, not one for the public."

"I understand. It is a novelty to me to see a lady engaged in your calling. May I ask if you have arrived at any deductions?"

"Frankly, I have not. In criminal matters I do not think my calling would help to fit me with judicial acumen. I shall write only what I have seen and heard, and you know what that is. I suppose," she suddenly added, "that you can give me no more information?"

Closely she scanned his face, but there was nothing there to give her light. Her brief theory died away as he answered:

"Unfortunately, I can throw no light upon the matter. As I told the uppish detective, I was never admitted to Paulus Andrews's confidence, if he had anything especial to tell. I will throw memory back and try to see if more will return to me of the little he did say—"

Quickly the reporter overcame the woman.

"Can I see you again?" she demanded.

"Certainly."

He drew a card from his pocket, wrote an address below his name, and then handed it to her.

"You can see me there at any time when I am in, if we do not meet elsewhere before that."

"Thank you, and I should be glad to have you give the paper with which I am connected the benefit of anything new you may recall. Of course I shall now give way in the case to some male reporter, for this is not my line; but I should be glad to turn in whatever you can tell. Business is business, and I shall be a gainer if I can write a good 'story' on the subject."

Her professional zeal amused Bronson, but he remained grave of face. He really admired this business woman.

"I will not forget your wishes, and I trust we shall meet again. Now, it may be that Wageline did not see me leave, and that he would object to losing sight of so valuable a witness if he should realize I was going, so I will disappear before he can stop me. Of course I am more than willing to help ferret out the murderers of poor An-

draws, and this I intend to do if I can, but I know the way of petty detectives and other officials too well to allow myself to be inconvenienced just now by a cranky fellow like Wageline."

"You cannot justly be blamed."

"Thank you. Now, I will delay you no longer."

The last promise might not have been so readily made, but Essex saw that Minola was anxious to get to the newspaper office, and he gave due respect to her wishes. They separated, and he walked on alone.

"A queer encounter!" he murmured. "This young lady is out of the common run, but why shouldn't women be in journalism as well as men? She certainly has the brains. I hope we shall meet again."

His mind drifted to other subjects.

"Poor Andrews's experience in New York was short," he thought. "He put much stress on his home-coming, and seemed to think he was to meet with wealth, fame and happiness. What did he really tell to me?"

It was not strange that Essex had to reflect keenly, for Paulus Andrews had not only borne a face marked with lines of dissipation, but he had drank a good deal of liquor on the steamer, and admitted that he usually drank even harder.

Thus, he had not made the impression that a temperate man would.

"First of all, I recollect that he claimed to have invented something which was bringing him in piles of money, though, if I recall his words aright, the income was yet to be fingered by him. This was something which may have had foundation in fact, and then, again, it may all have been idle talk. An inventor! I wonder if that would be any clue? It seems very vague, just now."

"Then, he talked about a 'little girl,' as he expressed it, he was to see and 'make rich.' I remember I got the impression she was a relative, but whether he meant a child by 'little girl,' or whether it was a term of endearment I don't think I ever learned."

"How much was there in all his wandering talk? He had been decidedly dissipated—more, I think, than Detective Wageline suspected from my words to him, to-day, and this may have affected poor Andrews's mind. However, I'll take my time to meditate, and see if I can recall more of the vague information I did not heed when it was given."

"It is a pity Andrews never was outspoken, for it is a fact that he never told me anything definite. Whatever I may grasp will be thread-like, for he kept his own counsel."

While thus meditating Essex had gone along the street until he reached a place two blocks distant from the scene of the tragedy. As he went thus an exclamation in a man's voice abruptly floated to his hearing:

"Stop it, or I will drive this knife to your heart!"

Sanguinary threat! With such words one associates the human brute, and, in this case, the voice, itself, carried out the idea to Essex. Then he heard the reply:

"Don't dare to touch me!"

"Then be sensible. Stop your heroics, or I'll do ye up!"

Bronson had paused impulsively, and he discovered that the words came from a door at one side. It was a saloon, but the door, itself, was not the main entrance, and was no more than two swinging slat-doors which shut out the view of a casual passer, but did little more.

It was a side-room connected with the place, and, as the voices indicated, was then occupied by a man and a woman.

Essex was enough influenced by the sanguinary threats so that he continued to stand still and wait for further developments.

The woman answered the last words firmly:

"You will gain nothing by acting the bully, and I assure you that something may be lost. You are not dealing with one weak in more than muscle, and you may as well know it at once."

"Well, I don't want ter threaten ye," was the half-apologetic response, "but I don't want no more such talk."

"I cannot help it. I am very nervous since what he did. His face haunts me."

"Nonsense!"

"It may yet be so with you."

"Never, by gar!"

"We will see. Now, can the lost pin be found?"

"Doubtful."

"Will you undertake to look? I don't want such a thing floating around, for it may make mischief. I have no wish to get into the hands of the police."

"No danger!"

"You are simply doggedly reckless, and I say once more that if you want to win hard cash in this matter you must use common sense. You may be able to defy the police, but I am not."

"Well, missus, I'll do my best ter find the jigger you've lost."

Essex Bronson found this vague talk of interest to him, and he took the risk of pushing the swinging doors a little further back so he could get view of the man and the woman. Then he saw them both—the man a person of ponderous frame, with very black hair and stubbly mustache, and an ox-like neck set on a small head; the woman a slender, well formed individual whose face was concealed by a thick veil.

The spy dropped the door and lost view of them, without having seen the man's face.

"When shall I hear from you?" she pursued.

"As soon as I kin make the hunt. I don't want ter be foolish, and do more hurt than good, ye know."

"You will act in good faith?"

"Yes."

"Good! If you are successful I will pay you well."

"I'll try."

"We are now in a delicate situation," she asserted. "We rise or fall on the events of the next few hours, and my life is worth so much to me that I want to save it from danger."

She rose, and Essex knew the place was no longer one suited to him. Suggestive as much of the conversation was, he did not see that it need interest him.

Men, however, often judge incorrectly.

Shortly after the veiled woman left the saloon, but when she hurried away toward City Hall Park she went unnoticed except vaguely by those she passed by. Essex had passed on.

CHAPTER V.

TONY'S SIDE-PARTNER.

MEDITATION often changes our views. It was so with Essex Bronson. His first idea had been to keep as much as possible out of the case arising from the death of Paulus Andrews, but when he was alone, and had thought on the subject, he gained new ideas. Paulus had come back to New York with certain hopes and plans, and all had been defeated by his sudden and violent death.

It was a matter fruitful of meditation, and Essex saw the sad side to it clearly.

"It is my duty to tell all I can, and help to the utmost," he finally decided. "Andrews was nothing to me, but he was a man with a human soul, and my duty must not be shirked."

Essex went back to the place of tragedy.

When he reached the street door he was joined by two other persons who seemed to be going up like himself. One was a boy of fifteen years who had a quantity of suspenders thrown over his arm, rightly giving the impression that he was a seller of the articles named. The other was a little man of at least sixty, nervous and odd of manner, keen of eye and wildly equipped with hair and beard.

The latter looked at Essex with his little eyes all aglow.

"Heard of the murder?" he demanded, in a quick, shrill voice.

"Yes, sir."

"Great case!"

"Is it?"

"Yes, just suits me;" and the old man rubbed his hands together with an air which coincided with his words.

"You should not speak thus of the loss of human life," reprovingly returned Bronson.

"Ho! ho! Seems sad to you, does it?"

"It certainly does."

"Different with me—very different! Ho! ho! You see, Tony Wageline has the case, and I'm Old Harry Hawk, Tony's side-partner."

"A detective, eh?"

"I am, but Tony wouldn't admit it. Jealous, Tony is—wants all the glory to himself. Only a dish-washer he thinks me, so to say. But I am all detective. Ho! ho!"

In speech and manner Old Harry was as eccentric as in looks, and Essex forgot his want of feeling; the man looked as if he was not wholly right mentally.

They had been climbing up the stairs while they talked, and they now arrived on the roof. The situation had not changed materially. The delay of the coroner in appearing on the scene had left the body where it first lay, and Wageline had been busy searching for clues.

He greeted Old Harry sharply.

"Where in thunder have you been all this while?"

"Right here in New York!" chuckled Old Harry, not in the least abashed by the implied reproof.

"I have wanted you."

"Well, here I am. Show me the murderer and I will seize him with the strong arm of the law. This is it."

The side-partner doubled up his own skinny arm and chuckled anew. Wageline was too well accustomed to the ways of his aid to heed his cool unconcern, but he turned his regard sourly upon the youth with the suspenders, adding:

"Who have we here? Curious persons are not wanted here. Who are you, boy?"

"Oh! I'm Chimmie Dunn, an' I sell suspenders," was the calm reply. "Kin I sell you a pair?"

"You can get off this roof before I kick a hole through you. Git!"

Wageline started forward, but Chimmie stepped to one side.

"Say, boss, lemme have one glimps' at the dead man, will yer? Hullo! I've seen him afore, by jinks!"

"You have?"

"Sure, Mike!"

"No lying, now; it won't help you to stay up here."

"But I'm on the square. See? I've set my peepers on his nibs before, an' only yesterday, too. Why, Tim O'Killen had him in tow, an' was pilotin' him around the beer-shops an' fillin' him up with bad drink. Yes, an' this feller was so bad his breath would set fire to an alderman's cheek."

"Is this straight?"

"Yes, boss."

"He was seen by you yesterday, accompanied by another man?"

"Yes, an' the man was Tim O'Killen."

"Who is Tim?"

"Right bower fer Babe Brazer, who keeps the sailor's boardin'-house. Don't you know him? All South street does."

"I know Babe Brazer well by reputation, and a hard case he is. The record of his sailors' boarding-house is thoroughly bad, and he should have been suppressed by the police, long ago. Do you say this Tim O'Killen is a friend of Babe's?"

"Works fer him."

"Works for Babe, and"—looking toward the East River—"Babe's unholy place is but a few rods away. By Jove! that is striking and suspicious. Why was the dead man found so near Babe's?"

"I'll bet ye a pair o' suspenders that Babe an' Tim was the ones who did him up!" cried Chimmie.

"Why do you repeat what I have just said?" demanded Tony, with a scowl. "When I get a clue I forbid you or anybody else to harp on it, as if you found it. This is my idea! I say it's likely Babe and his gang did it. Aha! I have the clue, and I'll soon run them to earth now. Good as settled!"

Old Harry Hawk coughed.

"What's that?" snorted Wageline.

"Touch of asthma, I reckon," dryly replied the side-partner.

"I won't have any coughing, or other scoffing here. Understand? This is my case."

"Sure, and you've got a cinch on it," agreed Old Harry, coolly.

Essex Bronson watched the men and speculated. From the first he had not liked Wage-

line, and he liked him even less now. The man's face was not a good one. He looked too much like the men he was supposed to bring to justice, and, though Essex felt that he ought to believe in a man who had a recognized position as a detective, he could not bring himself to do it fully.

Old Harry Hawk was a character in his way. His wild expression still awakened the idea in Essex's mind that he was not exactly right mentally, and, moreover, he did not look any more like an angel than did Wageline. A sharp and crafty pair, Essex thought.

There did not appear to be any love lost between them, either, if they were associated in business.

The side-partner's habit of chuckling had seized him again, after his last speech, and he was thus engaged when he abruptly stopped. Lil the Lamplighter had crossed his vision, and, somehow, she made a deep impression on him. He dropped into silence, his jaw fell and his mouth became wide open; his narrow face lost its keenness, and he stared at Lil blankly.

All this Bronson noticed, and, eccentric as Old Harry was, the young man was impressed with the belief that there was some radical reason for the effect produced by her fresh, girlish face.

She did not observe the side-partner's emotion, and there was nothing to interrupt Old Harry, and nothing to prevent Essex looking to his fill.

The old man pressed his hand to his forehead and stared hard. The first blankness gave place to doubt, wonder and puzzled uncertainty, but he seemed to find the survey of importance to him in the next few minutes.

As he recovered a trifle he fell to muttering strangely, though all of Bronson's efforts to overhear his words were in vain. Plainly, however, Old Harry was deeply moved for one of his peculiar nature. Why should he be moved thus? What was there about Lil that had awakened so much excitement in his usually indifferent nature?

Bronson could not answer his own question. He at first thought of speaking to Old Harry bluntly on the subject, but he changed his mind, and, as the side-partner finally recovered his wits, the event passed unnoticed by all the rest of the party.

The future was destined to bring it up again, however.

Wageline had been talking with the policeman who was on guard, but he now came forward as the central figure again.

"Well," he remarked, confidently, "we will soon wind this up now."

"Do you still associate this Babe Brazer, of whom you have spoken, with the crime?" inquired Essex.

"Of course."

"A hard citizen, is he?"

"Perfect rascal—ought to have been sat down on and sent to prison long ago. The fact that a tool of his was seen with Andrews is sufficient to settle it all. The old man was simply decoyed to the den and done away with."

"I shall be glad to see you bring him to justice in this case."

"It will be very easy. You see, stranger, I have a 'pull' at Police Headquarters, and when I want a thing I get it."

Essex looked doubtful.

"Now, Bronson," added Wageline, "I am going to Babe Brazer's den, and I want you to accompany Hawk and myself. Yes, and this boy must make one of the party. Come on, all!"

CHAPTER VI.

BABE BRAZER'S DEMAND.

It was evening of that day when the keeper of the sailors' boarding-house alighted from the Elevated Railroad at one of the up-town stations and walked slowly away through a side-street. As he went his manner was somewhat furtive, and, if anybody had been watching him closely, it would have been perceived that he was fearful of being followed.

Several times he glanced over his shoulder, and twice he paused in a doorway and watched for awhile, but he saw nothing to alarm him.

"I reckon it's all right," he muttered, presently.

Then he moved on boldly, and soon reached one of the many "flat" buildings of the vicinity. Entering the vestibule he looked for awhile and then touched an electric bell. The door opened and he entered the hall.

Two flights of stairs he ascended, and then he encountered a woman in the hall there.

"Good-evening, Miss Edwards!" he spoke.

"Oh! is it you?" she returned.

"Nobody else."

"Come in, at once."

She seemed both sorry to see him and agitated thereby, and appeared to ask him in to get him out of sight. He entered; she closed the door, and they were shut off from the hall and public view. They were not alone, though; a man was there, and it was the Rodman Stacey who figured so prominently in the opening scenes of this record.

"What is wrong?" Stacey demanded, quickly.

"Nothing," replied Babe.

"Then why are you here?"

"Ter make a report. Hev you seen the evenin' papers?"

"Yes."

"What did you read?"

"The announcement of the death of Paulus Andrews. Who is this Essex Bronson who recognized him? Is there danger from Bronson?"

Stacey spoke hurriedly, anxiously, but Babe was unmoved.

"Mister Bronson is a keen-lookin' young feller, but I don't reckon we need ter worry about him. He simply was a feller passenger on the steamer with Andrews, an' that was all. But there is a thing we want ter look to right away."

"What?"

"You read that Detective Tony Wageline was in charge of the case, didn't ye?"

"Yes."

"Do you know him?"

"No. What of him?"

"He will make it hot fer us, unless he is shut off."

"Must more blood be shed?" cried the woman, who had been called Miss Edwards, nervously.

"Who said anything about bloodshed?" growled Babe, curtly.

"You said he must be shut off."

"Not by violence. I ain't no fool, an' we don't want two cases hangin' over us at one an' the same time. No, you hark ter me. The paper went ter press afore all was known there which really come out, an' I knew you would want to hear the rest."

"What is it?"

"Wageline has been at my place."

"The dickens he has!" cried Stacey.

"Yes, an' he's got a witness who see Tim O'Killen with Andrews, yesterday, and Wageline has accused me of decoyin' the dead man ter my place an' doin' him up."

"Ruin!" exclaimed Stacey.

"Mercy!" gasped Miss Edwards.

"That is the fact," Babe assured.

"Then ruin stares us in the face!" added Miss Edwards, excitedly.

"Let me tell ye all about it," requested Babe. "This afternoon, late, I was in my boardin'-house when in come Wageline, with Bronson, a kid named Jimmy Dunn, and others. Wageline had been pokin' around, the kid had seen Tim an' Andrews together, the day before, and he had told Wageline all he knew."

"The detective come in with a mighty big swagger, an' he was goin' ter have me confess right away, but I didn't confess for a cent."

"I declared that Andrews had not been in my place, an' that I'd never seen him. Tim was produced, an' he was shrewd enough not ter make a bad break. He admitted he had been with Andrews, but swore he had left him, alive an' well, some distance away from my place."

"Proof was not at hand, for or against this claim, but it was as good as anything else until proved a lie, an' so it rests now."

"But," interrupted Stacey, "a witness may appear who saw the two men, Tim and Andrews, enter your house together."

"Tim was careful about that."

"It proves nothing. Despite his care, they may have been seen. Anyhow, now

that the detective is on the scent he is going to hunt to the very end."

Babe Brazer moved his chair forward with the air of one deeply interested in his subject.

"I wanted to see you about that. Wageline must be shut off."

"How can it be?"

"I ain't lived in this city all my life without knowin' something about Mister Wageline. He's a detective, an' he's tolerable sharp, but the first an' prime object o' his bein' on earth is ter look out for Tony Wageline. He don't care a rap fer justice or law, but he wants good money fer himself."

"I think I see."

"He stands pretty well at Police Headquarters, an' they don't seem ter be onto him; an' he's got some of the city officials ready ter use the same snuff-box he does. I don't charge nothin' against any o' them, fer I don't know nothin', an' they maybe blind ter all he does—he may be playin' them fer fools—but this much is sure: Wageline kin be bought up!"

"Good!"

"He's done more ter help crooks than any other man in this city, fer he's not only let up on them when they put up the stuff, but he gives tips ter them who make et an object, so they kin keep out o' trouble with the police."

"I see."

"He is a reg'lar crook, hisself, an' money will buy him every time. Now, he has full charge of this case, an' as he is known ter be sharp, an' the dead man is friendless, it ain't likely nobody else will be put on the case. Just you see Wageline an' make et an object ter him to let up, an' I'll bet you hard cash he announces ter-morrer that there is nothin' in the evidence against Tim O'Killen an' my house."

"Must it be done to-night?"

"Sure!"

"I am not yet wholly well, but I suppose I can got out."

"You must."

"Then I will."

Stacey made a motion to rise, but Babe stopped him.

"One word, first. Kin you let me hev the money you promised fer puttin' Andrews out o' the way?"

"Why you have not earned it."

"Ain't Andrews dead?"

"Did you kill him?"

"No."

"Did Tim O'Killen?"

"No."

"Or any of your other men?"

"No."

"Do you know who did?"

"No," Babe admitted. "Now, let me ask you a few questions. Did you kill him? Or did she?" pointing to Miss Edwards. "Or do you know who did?"

"I am compelled to answer no to all these questions," replied Stacey.

"Just so. Andrews gave us the slip, last night, when we rashly left him alone in the room, or else somebody helped him off; an' we all supposed, since we could not find him then, that he escaped, until we see by the papers that he had been found dead on a roof some distance from my house. At least, that is the way you heerd of it—it drifted around down-town before the evenin' papers was out; an' then I got it straight from Wageline, when he called with his investigation committee."

"You are right. Andrews gave us the slip, and if he was murdered—"

"He was, sure."

"Well, you did not do it, and none of us know who did. Then how can you claim the reward I promised you for doing the work?"

"Didn't I do all but the givin' of the fatal blow?"

"Yes, but none of us did that."

"He's dead, an' I took jest as much risk as if I had done the final act."

"Yet, you didn't fulfill the contract," stubbornly replied Stacey.

"Well, Andrews is dead, an' the attention o' the public an' the police has been called to my house. I'm jest as innocent o' the killin' as a cherub, but Wageline says I did it, an' ef he proves that Tim did escort Andrews ter my place, it will go hard with

me. I must have something fer my trouble an' danger. I'll ask ye ag'in," sulkily added the visitor, "ter give me the money I claim is my due."

CHAPTER VII.

THE CASE DARKENS.

RODMAN STACEY was a bold man, but he was also world-wise enough to be aware that prudence was quite as essential as courage, and when Babe Brazer made his demand in such a way the chief of the conspirators did not for a moment think of refusing him.

He took out a roll of bills and placed it under Babe's eyes.

"I think there should be a discount in this case," he remarked, "because of the fact that Paulus Andrews escaped us, but I will not ask you to let me scale the price much. Will that be enough?"

Babe counted the roll.

"That's fair," he agreed.

"Then take it and call us square. Of course I expected to pay you something, if Andrews did escape us, and I want you to feel satisfied, you see."

"I be satisfied," replied the keeper of the boarding-house.

"Enough, then. Now, one thing more. Who killed Paulus Andrews?"

"By gar! it's the queerest thing I hev ever struck!" declared Babe.

"When we left him alone in the room he seemed to be so stupid with drink that he could not move. When we got back he was gone, and all of our search failed to find him. Who killed him?"

"I ain't got the least idee."

"The papers say his skull was fractured. Could it have been the result of a fall?"

"The papers an' Wageline say not, an' ef it was, how come he on the very top of that buildin'?"

"Sure enough!"

"I am glad his death cannot be attributed to us," added Miss Edwards, "but, nevertheless, his face haunts me."

"Nonsense!" exclaimed Stacey.

"I can't get him out of my mental sight—"

"Let that drop, Daisy," requested Stacey, curtly. "We did not kill him, yet he is dead. What better luck could we ask for? Well, Mr. Brazer, shall we go and see Detective Wageline now?"

"Yes. We don't want ter give him another day ter smell around, or he will find out, sure, that Andrews was decoyed to my place, an' then it will take more than money ter save us, ef the news gets abroad. Buy Wageline off this very night—that's the only safe way."

"Come, then."

"Rodman, you won't be gone long, will you?" nervously asked Miss Edwards.

"Only a short time, Daisy, but you must get over your foolish fears. We are quite safe, and, even if our share in the events of the night was found out, what could they do to us? We did not kill Paulus."

"I will try to remember it."

"For your own sake, do so! Don't worry about what is not necessary, my dear."

"I'll try not to."

Stacey and Babe went out, but, when they were gone, Daisy suddenly and excitedly clasped her hands.

"Not worry!" she exclaimed. "I only wish I could obey, but they do not know. They see nothing but my reluctance to be concerned in the death of a man. That would be enough, surely, but I agreed to that, and should be foolish to weaken now. I should not weaken if I had not seen his face. If they only knew why I fainted. If they knew all—ah! if I only knew all! This doubt and suspense is terrible!"

She dropped into a chair, covered her face with her hands and sat trembling perceptibly.

It was near noon, the following day, when Essex Bronson met Minola Alden and Lil the Lamplighter on a down-town street—a meeting purely accidental, but one he was not slow to take advantage of. He paused and greeted Minola.

"Are you still on your case?" he inquired, smiling.

"Not on the murder case, I hope," she replied. "As I told you before, that is not my line. After my first report I handed the case over to more suitable hands."

"Jiminy! I wouldn't have give up such a cinch!" declared Lil.

"You might try your luck," suggested Minola.

"I could do as well as Tony Wageline. He ain't no good, I think. I'll bet Chimmie Dunn could knock the socks off from him at detective business. I just do so!"

Both Essex and Minola smiled at Lil's enthusiasm, and then the woman reporter asked:

"Are there any new developments to-day, Mr. Bronson?"

"I don't know; I have been searching for Wageline, but, though he has been around in this vicinity, I have not found him yet."

"Jiminy! there he is now!" cried Lil.

This exclamation caused Lil's companions to look, and they saw the detective coming toward them. He reached the spot, but would have kept on without a sign of recognition had not Essex hailed him.

"Oh! so it's you," replied Wageline, none too amiably.

"Yes. We are here, and all anxious to hear the latest developments."

"What about?" inquired Tony.

"Why the murder case, of course."

"The Andrews matter, I see. I have so many under way at once that I can't catch a lone idea like a non-professional. Well, all is progressing well, sir; very well."

"Have you arrested Babe Brazer and Tim O'Killen?"

"Bless me, no!"

"Is not the evidence yet strong enough?"

"That was a false scent, Mr. Bronson."

"It was?"

"Yes, I have sifted it to the bottom and found there was nothing in it. When I get on a case I just make things hum. Well, I have learned positively that they could not have had a hand in the killing of Andrews."

"How was that?"

"Tim and Andrews were together, of course, but they separated long before Andrews ceased cruising around this district. Of that I have proof not to be doubted. Several men testify to the fact that Tim did leave early, while Andrews kept up his drunken cruise. Then, as to Babe Brazer's sailors' resort, I have men who were there all the evening and played cards with Babe and Tim. These two men are out of the consideration, while as for Andrews having been in the house at all, he was not. My informants say so, and they were near an open door which opened into the hall near the outer door. If Andrews had come in they would have seen him, but he did not come in. Thus, there is nothing to the Brazer and O'Killen episode."

Bronson looked decidedly disappointed. He had been hopeful that the right clue had been struck, and this collapse of the whole fabric was unexpected.

"Is your evidence trustworthy—"

"Didn't I say it was?"

"I believe you did."

"Then that settles it. Besides, I have a new clue, and it promises to be the one we want."

"May I ask what it is?"

"No harm in asking, sir, but I can't tell. I should be a fine detective to go shouting all I know all over New York."

Wageline was cranky of manner, and Bronson grew offended.

"I did not intend to pry into your secrets—"

"Good resolution! Stick to it, and you will be a man before your grandmother will!"

With this announcement Wageline passed on, striding down the street as if pressing business called him. He left no friend behind him, and his last flippant words made Essex scowl perceptibly. He resented such a cheap and threadbare joke from a stranger.

"Well, that's cool!" exclaimed Minola.

"His way may be the proper way for a New York detective," added Essex, warmly, "but I do not see it in that light."

"Say, what do you expect from Tony?" demanded Lil. "I tell ye he's a bad lot, an' you don't want ter take no stock in him. Jiminy! but wasn't he sassy!"

Bronson tried to swallow his chagrin over the personal affront.

"I am disappointed at the collapse of our clue," he remarked, slowly.

"It is surprising," replied Minola.

"With the reputation that Babe Brazer and Tim bear, it seemed to be the best of clues, especially as Andrews was found so near the house kept by Brazer."

"It is possible that Wageline knows best, but the suspicion looked so well founded, as it was last night, that it is surprising now to be told there is nothing in it. It illustrates what changes one night can make."

"Tony would just as soon lie as not," commented Lil.

Her assertion passed without reply. She had all along shown a dislike to Wageline, and, as she was a mere child, her elder companions saw no more than dislike in the present declaration.

"Well, I suppose we shall have to rest as patiently as we can," pursued Essex. "I am not a detective, and it is not my work to do this job, even if I were capable. Perhaps Wageline will solve the mystery—yet I can't get over my surprise at this collapse."

"I feel like you, but he ought to know—perhaps."

In this frame of mind the three persons separated, but, as Bronson, for one, hoped, not without prospect of meeting again.

CHAPTER VII.

SOMETHING ABOUT ANDREWS.

Essex Bronson's temporary quarters were at a hotel. Before he went abroad his home had been in the city, but he had no relatives there, and when he returned, on this occasion, he had sought the best accommodations open to him, since he had the money to gratify his tastes.

When he returned to the hotel, after leaving Minola and Lil, he went to his private room. He had considerable baggage for one of his sex, and much of it had not been opened since he reached New York.

Now he intended to put everything to rights, so he would feel more at home. This he proceeded to do.

Among the other things were two valises. One had contained the things he had needed immediately, and it had been unpacked as soon as he found quarters. The other was yet locked, just as it had been left on the steamer, but he now reached it with the rest.

Turning the key, he exposed the interior, and commenced putting the various things away. As he did so he noticed something at one side which did not look familiar. He reached for it, as it lay at one side of the valise, and brought it up.

It was a long, flat pocketbook, designed for the breast-pocket of a man's coat. He regarded it in wonder.

"What's all this?" he muttered. "It's none of my property, so how did it get in here?"

Curiously he opened it. No money greeted his vision, and the book seemed to be unmarked, but there were several papers, neatly folded and put in the compartments.

"They ought to give me some light—Hallo! what's this? The name of Paulus Andrews? Well, this is surprising!"

He held a closely-written paper. Its nature he had yet to learn, but he had seen the name indicated—it had appeared to leap at him from the paper, as it were.

His gaze then wandered to the valise, itself.

"This surely is my property, yet the pocket-book is not. I fail to see how it could have come into my possession—Wait, though!"

His mind went back to the days on the steamer. Just before he embarked he had purchased the valise at a local store. Later on, when he came to know Andrews, he had found that the latter had bought a mate to it at about the same time. The fact was made more memorable by an occurrence just previous to the landing in New York.

He and Andrews were packing up to go ashore when, their two valises being near each other, he had noticed Paulus about to put something in the wrong valise—in Essex's own. He had called his companion's attention to it, and the mistake had been rectified.

Now, it was plain that, previous to that moment, Paulus had made another mistake, and one nobody had then discovered. Briefly, Andrews had put his book in the wrong valise, and the error had been but just found out.

"Poor fellow!" murmured Bronson, "he little suspected, then, what the future had in store for him. This is a sad memento."

He regarded the book seriously, but a new thought suddenly came to him. His face brightened.

"We all lack information of him, and this may help us out—not that his history is likely to be here, but there should be something which would lead to it, if worked out. Here is the paper—what does it say?"

He read slowly, as much of it was puzzling to him, so overloaded was it, to the non-professional mind, with technical terms.

"It appears to be the rough sketch of some invention he had planned and executed. Designed for use in wool carding machinery, is it? And he claims it will revolutionize the art. Barring the technical terms and description, I see no more to it. Refers to himself as a citizen of New York. Not much light here for me. What next?"

He unfolded another paper.

"Outline of agreement between Paulus Andrews and one Rodman Stacey by which they are to share in the same invention referred to previously. Stacey furnishes money, and thereby acquires share in the machinery. That is one more step."

A third paper was scanned, and it was in these words:

"MEMORANDUM: 1. Improved machinery for wool-carding invented by Paulus Andrews. An idea sure to succeed.

"2. Took Rodman Stacey into company with me, he to furnish money I lacked, and I to divide profits with him, equally.

"3. Agreement made with iron manufacturers, and machinery first constructed in their shops.

"4. Some considerable machinery sold. Stacey, as cashier, paid me \$300, but by his advice we decide to keep most of money in active business. Stacey has good business head.

"5. Business booming since the last previous item. I draw only enough for expenses, for Stacey thinks best to keep money in business. I can't see how so much of it can be needed, since we have things made by iron-workers, but Stacey has good business head, and I have not. He assures me that, under his management, we are sure to come out millionaires. This is encouraging.

"6. Good trade fully established. Things booming, and all pointing to immense fortunes for us. I do not see why we don't draw more out of accumulated receipts. Stacey keeps my allowance down too low. Must see him and learn why he is not willing to let me have more.

"7. Stacey has paid me another \$300 and promised to manage business so as to divide \$25,000 to me in six months. In the mean while I am going to make the tour of the Southern lands—don't know just where, for it is Stacey's idea. He will furnish me with a man as companion. Stacey is a valuable friend. Great business head, he has.

"8. For a wonder I am sober. Monks keeps me drinking whisky until even my hardened stomach revolts. I am tired of Monks. I have tried my best to shake him off, but it can't be done; he sticks to me. If Stacey had no better man to recommend he would have done well to recommend nobody. If I had come alone I should have been sober occasionally. If Monks does not get me drunk again, first, I am going home by next steamer. It occurs to me that I am nothing in this business with Stacey. Ever since I've been abroad he has sent me just enough to pay my bills, and always in care of Monks. It seems odd.

"9. Beg into think I shall never get home. Monks keeps me drunk nearly all the time. Why does Stacey never answer my letters to him? I am his partner in the invention, yet he writes only to Monks, and has him tell me what I am to know. I was reckless not to have a definite paper drawn up with Stacey, stating my rights in this invention

of mine. What if he denies it was my invention? Can I prove it? I don't know—Stacey seems to be king. I am bound to go home and see him, and have things fixed so I may be sure of my rights. I owe it to myself, and to the little girl who is my heiress. I begin to doubt Mr. Stacey."

Here the record ended.

Essex leaned back and meditated.

There was food for much of thought in the paper.

"Strange!" he murmured.

For a long time he sat motionless, and then he re-read the document with careful attention.

"The first seven items seem to have been written in New York, and the others while on his trip," commented Bronson. "There is no date, and nothing to tell how long a period of time is covered by the items, but it probably is not over a year or such a matter. I think he told me, orally, that he was abroad four months.

"It is a suggestive record. Plainly, he had ample faith in this man Stacey until considerable time had elapsed; then his faith weakened little by little.

"Andrews was not a business man, and Stacey did all that part. It is odd that he kept Andrews on short allowance as to money, if he meant him well.

"Suspicion was in Andrews's mind when they were abroad, but when he wished to return to New York he was kept drunk by Monks, a man the same as forced upon him by Stacey, it appears. I remember, now, that he personally referred to Monks, in conversation with me. He represented Monks as one who was always inviting him to drink, and said he was kept more or less drunk all the time. Finally, however, Monks took yellow fever and died, and then Andrews sobered up and started for New York.

"Andrews did not want to go abroad. Why did Stacey prevail upon him to go? Monks was Stacey's choice as companion to Andrews. If he knew Andrews's weakness for liquor, why did he send along a man who would all the while tempt him?

"The last words of the unfortunate man are, 'I begin to doubt Mr. Stacey!' That is suggestive!"

Bronson paused for a moment, and then added:

"Yes, and it is suggestive that, as soon as he landed, another man was found to tempt him as Tim O'Killen did."

Deeply had Essex become interested in the case. Paulus Andrews had been his own worst enemy, but he had not been a man of vicious or unmanly qualities, and his sad end appealed keenly to his one-time acquaintance. The latter wished to solve his fate, but when his mind turned to Tony Wageline he shook his head.

"He is not the man for the case."

A pause, and then Essex added:

"I would like to know what real grounds the detective had for abandoning the theory that Tim O'Killen was concerned in the matter. I do not yet clear Tim, and I want to know more about this mysterious partner, Rodman Stacey. How can I learn of him?"

Acting upon an idea, the speaker suddenly rose.

Descending to the hotel office he consulted the city Directory which lay on the clerk's desk. He had hoped to find the name of Rodman Stacey, and ascertain where he resided, but the quest was in vain. The name did not appear there.

Baffled in this intention Bronson walked to the window and stood looking out. Several minutes passed, and then his but half-attentive gaze grew fixed and alert.

"Old Harry Hawk!" he murmured.

It was, indeed, the wild-eyed aid of Tony Wageline. He was moving along the street with a brisk tread, and would soon have been out of sight, but Bronson yielded to an impulse and hurried out after him. He remembered that, despite his wild eyes, the old man had an intelligent face, and he wanted to talk with him on a certain subject.

It was not hard to overtake the eccentric aid, and when Old Harry had greeted him with his usual abrupt manner, Essex opened on him.

"May I ask, Mr. Hawk, if you have given up all attention to Babe Brazer and Tim O'Killen?"

"Certain, certain, certain! Innocent men, both!" replied Old Harry.

"How do you know?"

"I am a detective, sir. Yes, yes, a detective. Can I err? Not much—I am sure! Ho! ho!"

"Is this your opinion, or Wageline's?" demanded Essex, curtly.

"Both! I think so, and Wageline knows it. He never errs, does Wageline; and what he says goes. Great man is Wageline."

"I don't agree with either of you," bluntly declared Bronson.

"Ho! ho! Say, you, what bug have you in your head?"

CHAPTER IX.

OLD HARRY GROWS MYSTERIOUS.

As Old Harry asked the question he stopped suddenly and seized Essex by a button-hole. His keen little eyes gleamed brighter than usual, and he had all of his oddity at the front, but he did not appear very much interested in his own question.

Bronson hastened to release himself.

"I am not aware that I have any 'bug,'" he coldly answered, "but I am not blind to evidence. Now, Mr. Hawk, if you want to earn good, solid money, give your attention carefully to this case. Paulus Andrews was my acquaintance when alive, and, dead, he merits the pity of all. I am interested in him, and if you help to solve the mystery of his death I will pay you well out of my own pocket."

"Ho! ho! Do you think money will make me or Wageline more active? Sir, we are devoted to our calling, and we make the most successful detective combination in New York. Money won't make us sharper—the cause of justice is all the goddess we have. Trust in Wageline—a man of remarkable foresight, shrewdness and honesty—a wonderful man. Trust in him, and believe all he says."

Bronson was disgusted. Clearly, Old Harry was the blind tool of Wageline's will, and he was sorry he had wasted any time on him.

Dropping the subject, he next inquired:

"Are you on the case now? If not, I may as well leave you."

"Come with me."

"Why?"

"I am going to see the body."

"Whose?"

"Andrews's, of course."

"Is it near here?"

"Yes, at the undertaker's. Wageline tells me he anticipates a long chase, and, though he did not suggest it, I am going to see the dead man."

"I don't understand."

"Well, before I had got around to look at the body, when it lay on the roof, it had been identified wholly, and as I was very busy about the duties of the case, I did not look at it at all. Now, my way to business takes me right past the place where it is held by the undertaker, and as it is certainly best that I should know how the man did look, I am going in for my first view. Will you go along at my expense? It is my treat. Ho! ho!"

Old Harry evidently thought himself extremely humorous, but it was not the invitation which led Essex to a decision. If the body had got as far as the undertaker's it might be his last chance to see the face of his whilom acquaintance. He decided to accompany the detective's side-partner, and did so.

They entered the undertaker's shop.

"Show us Andrews, the deceased," directed Old Harry. "We want to have a bit of talk with him. Ho! ho!"

Essex could not repress a shiver. The detective's aid seemed utterly wanting in human feeling, and he became an object of loathing to Essex. The latter, however, said nothing, and the undertaker, who knew Hawk, indifferently replied:

"Go to the rear room; you know the place."

"Yes. Come in, Bronson."

They passed along, and entered a room so gloomy that Essex did not grow lighter-

hearted. It was not a large room, and things were huddled there, with the central article in a conspicuous quarter.

It was a contrivance of boards, with a white-sheeted object laid thereon which was not to be mistaken. It was all that remained of Paulus Andrews.

"This is the undertaker's special apartment," explained Old Harry, pausing. "See yonder door? It leads to a third room, and there he puts those who die natural deaths, and come here in the ordinary course of events. This is a sub-room, where he puts such cases as Andrews's. He never allows a public case to worry relatives of those who die naturally, and he's quite right. The third room is a nice one."

Essex did not see why all this explanation need interest him, but he was yet to see that the third room had a significance in the case which even Old Harry did not know of then.

Having talked his fill the detective's aid advanced to the sheeted form. He showed none of the reverence due the dead, and his manner was calm and matter-of-fact as he pulled the sheet away:

"We must all come to this, sooner or later," he remarked, halting with the sheet half raised. "Man is of few days and full of trouble and even a live dog may bay at a dead lion. Dead, we are smaller than the robins that chirrup in the trees, and we are hustled into the ground as if we had lost all our usefulness when we can't earn bread any longer for our heirs. Ho! ho!"

Merrily the eccentric man pronounced his opinions, but he found no sympathy with Essex.

"That may be your idea and Wageline's; it is not mine!" retorted Bronson, warmly.

"Still harping on Wageline! Young man, Wageline is good, bold, shrewd and honorable. Revile not the live lion. Hold the lamp here!"

Essex did not refuse this request, and when Old Harry threw the sheet fully aside the light fell squarely and strong on the set, white face. They saw to what Andrews had come.

"So this is him?" murmured Hawk. "He bears the light well—not a blink of his eyes, and—Eh?"

The man, so unfeeling the moment before, broke off abruptly. Bronson had not been looking at him, but he gave a start so pronounced that the observer glanced quickly at him. Old Harry was no longer indifferent. His expression had changed remarkably, and he stood gazing at Andrews's face with every evidence of emotion of some sort.

Essex thought he looked startled.

"What—what—what?" muttered Old Harry.

Startled he surely was—more, he was agitated and surprised—he was moved with feelings out of the ordinary run for anybody of his calling. Bronson could not help seeing it, and he was shrewd enough to watch, only, and make no move to disturb the mood.

"What's this?" added Old Harry. "Am I dreaming? Is this a nightmare? No; I'm awake, but—but—What's this? What—what—what?"

It was not a coherent collection of words, but it fitted the mood he plainly was in. Indifferent as he was when he came there he was now surprised and agitated—he appeared to be shocked and dismayed to a radical degree.

Suddenly his eyes shot up, rather than were raised, and he cried to Essex fiercely:

"What is this?"

"Can't you see?"

"What trick on me is this?"

"There is no trick."

"Who is this?"

"Paulus Andrews."

"Do you know it of your own knowledge?—that is, do you know it is the man who was murdered?"

"Yes."

The sheet fell from Old Harry's hand, and he staggered back a pace. His eyes were wide open, but he did not appear to see anything before him. Straight at vacancy he stared, blankly, wildly, agitatedly—then he clasped his hands to his head and rubbed as if to clear away some actual object. Bronson could curb his curiosity no longer.

"Did you know the man?" he inquired.

Down went Old Harry's hands, and he fixed his regard on the questioner like a flash.

"Did—did—did I know him?" he repeated, his words struggling as if through palsied lips. "What, what? Know him? I know him? No, no; of course I do not. Why ask so foolish a question?"

"Then why are you so moved?"

"I am not moved."

"I say you are!" boldly asserted Bronson. "The face of this man has stirred you out of your selfish self as if by lightning's own work. You knew him, Hawk; I declare that you knew him!"

"False, false!" shrilly cried the detective's aid. "I knew him not—I never saw him or heard of him. He's only a man to me. Only—a—man!"

The last words were absently pronounced, and then the speaker abruptly took on a new manner. His expression became eager, his eyes gleamed with new light, and he sprang forward and clasped Essex's arm.

"Were you his friend?" he demanded.

"I was."

"Would you see his death avenged?"

"Yes."

"Then keep away from Tony Wageline! Few men can discover more than he, if he tries, but he is not trying this time. Look you, do you know what Wageline is? He's a crook; that's what he is. When it's to his interest he is sharp as men are made, but money will buy his soul. He has sold it more than once—if he's after a man, and that man, or his friends, will pay well, justice will never see its due. Don't trust Tony in this case; he has been bought up."

"To what end?"

"To defeat justice."

"Who has bought him up?"

"I don't know; I wish I did, but this much is sure: He backed off when his case looked very promising. Somebody has seen him, and led him to try to defeat justice. Wageline is a crook, and he has been bought off by the criminals in the case."

Vehemently Old Harry made these assertions, and he became an object of great interest and importance to Bronson.

"Help me to prove that and—"

"No, no!" interrupted Old Harry. "We don't want to prove it—not now. Show your batteries to Wageline and all is lost. You must work in cover. Work? Ay, that you must, for this deed must be avenged!"

Deeply was Essex interested in this new turn of affairs. His companion was trembling with excitement, and, clearly, agitated as he had rarely been before. Only himself knew what it meant, but that it was no small matter was plain. Bronson prepared to force the truth from him, but, at that moment, the undertaker's voice rose from the front room, saying:

"Walk into the apartment yonder and you can see the body."

Again Old Harry started; then he grasped Bronson's arm and dragged him toward the third room.

"Hide, hide!" he commanded.

There was only a curtain to check their flight, and this was flung aside. They gained cover just in time, for, as they turned, and the curtain fell into place again, the detective moved it at one side and they both saw the new-comer appear in the place they had just left.

"A woman!" murmured Old Harry.

It was a woman, and one closely veiled, yet, to Essex, she awakened recollection at once vague and vivid. Where had he seen her before. Quickly the mental answer came; it had been in the saloon.

She was the person who had been "haunted" by a mysterious face.

CHAPTER X.

THE VAILED WOMAN.

It was a time when Essex Bronson's wits moved quickly, and when he had gained the first clue his mind acted promptly.

He remembered how he had been walking along the street, the day after Paulus Andrews's murder, and had been brought to a halt by the unusual words from the saloon. Interested solely by the words, he had looked in secretly and seen both persons who were there, but not the face of either.

Of the two, the woman had been heavily

ailed, while the man's back had been toward Essex.

Later, when the latter accompanied Wageline to the sailors' boarding-house, Bronson had been impressed with the idea that Babe Brazer's general appearance had been like that of the man in the saloon, but as he knew nothing of the stranger's face, he could not tell whether they were alike in the last particular.

He had never expected to see the veiled woman again, yet, unless he was greatly in error, he did not see her now. True, the woman in the saloon had worn a brown veil, while this one wore blue, but the veils were alike in that they were so heavy as to be impenetrable, and he saw so much similarity of form that he was next to certain the two women were one and the same.

It was this decided belief which made him feel so deeply interested, as he stood by the curtained door and watched the unknown in the room where Paulus Andrews lay.

"Why is she here?"

Bronson mentally asked the question, and then a movement on Old Harry Hawk's part was so suggestive that he touched his companion's arm and whispered:

"Remain quiet! Wait, watch and listen!"

"I am with you."

The detective's side-partner answered with equal caution, and the woman had nothing to tell her she was under survey.

She had halted inside the room and was engaged in a careful scrutiny of what was there, but, when she noticed the sheeted form, she gave a start, and then had eyes for nothing else. The veil still hid her face, but Bronson believed she was agitated. Be that it might, she was slow to make any further movement.

At last she stirred, however.

Picking up the lamp she advanced to the central object and slowly lifted the sheet. Her manner, Bronson thought, was that of a person who had nerved herself to a painful task, and found her nerves even then treacherous and weak.

She saw the still face, and then she became nearly as motionless.

Seconds wore on into minutes before she broke the pause. When she did break it, the way was of a striking nature. Perhaps she had found it impossible to see as clearly through the thick cover as she wished.

She raised the veil.

"Ho! ho!"

Old Harry Hawk breathed the exclamation softly, while Essex eagerly leaned forward to get the view he had wanted to have so long. He saw a person still young, and not bad looking, but nothing more was conveyed by the sight. Yet, then, and in the minutes which followed, he missed no opportunity to impress the face indelibly on his mind.

After a brief struggle, as if she would draw wholly away from the silent form, the woman grew fairly composed, and the gaze she bestowed on Andrews's face was more critical than agitated.

"Why does she look so attentively?" wondered Bronson. "Does she think she knows him, and seek to extinguish a doubt?"

It was a natural theory, yet Essex remembered the scene in the saloon, the talk there, his half formed impression that the Babe Brazer looked like the man of the pair, his growing belief that the woman had really been the one of the saloon, and he had less thought for recognition on her part than suspicion of her.

She gave no clue, herself.

Long and anxiously, it seemed, she looked, and then she dropped the sheet and turned away. Replacing the lamp on the table, she next lowered her veil and then walked out of the room.

"We want to know of her!" quickly declared Old Harry Hawk.

"What do you think of her?"

"I doubt the woman."

"In what way?"

"I can't tell you, but this visit seems worthy of attention. She does not go out of my sight to vanish forever."

The eccentricities of the speaker had grown markedly less, and his manner was decidedly alert as he left his hiding-place and hurried silently to the door leading to the front room. Essex followed.

The woman was still there, and speaking coolly to the undertaker.

"I had thought the man might be known to me," she explained, "but I find he was not."

"I see," indifferently replied he.

"Thank you for allowing me to look."

She passed out of the shop.

Old Harry promptly hastened to the street door.

"Come," he said, to Essex; "we will follow where she goes. Ah!"

Somewhat to his surprise she had entered a restaurant just opposite the undertaker's, and he relaxed his alert air.

"We have ample time," he remarked.

"She may be able to go out by another entrance," suggested Bronson.

"No; there is none. Our place is here, and here we can watch without worry. Elden," he added, to the undertaker, "do you know her?"

"No; never saw her before to-day."

"What did she say to you?"

"Merely that she wanted to see the dead man, as she thought it might be a man she knew. She had originally said her party was young, so I told her it could not be, but she went in, just the same."

The undertaker turned to his papers, and they had no more talk with him, nor did he hear their own words.

"I am going to see this out," declared Old Harry. "I mistrust this woman is not so innocent as she seems."

"Mr. Hawk," replied Essex, "are you to be trusted?"

"In this case, I am," was the swift answer.

"Yet, you are Wageline's right-hand man, and you say he is a literal crook, and has been brought up in this instance."

Old Harry straightened himself, and his eyes glittered as he retorted:

"In this case I am not Wageline's dog. I have done his dirty work, or my share, at least, for years. When I met you, to-day, I was prepared to let this matter go to ruin, since I knew Tony had so willed it, but I have changed my mind. Drop Wageline! You and I are on this case, and we will solve it. I swear it!"

The fierceness of the man's utterance perplexed Essex anew, but he was inclined to believe all he said. Essex felt he needed an aid, and he asked earnestly:

"Mr. Hawk, can I trust you?"

"To the death!"

"Then hear this," and the young man told of the interview he had partially heard in the saloon, and of his suspicion that the two persons there had been Babe Brazer and this woman.

"Ho! ho! we move on!" exclaimed Old Harry. "She was haunted by 'a face,' was she? And she had lost something which needed to be found, had she? And they would 'rise or fall by the events of the next few hours,' would they? Striking talk if they were this woman and Babe, but not of interest unless you are sure of their identity."

"I would not dare to swear to their identity, yet I am next to positive. I am sure it was they."

"Well, the fact alone is nothing, so is not our way to learn more?"

"Decidedly so, and we will do it. When this woman comes out we will follow her to her lair. I am no fool at the business; I have not trained so long with Wageline without having knowledge of detective work. Very likely I have done empty boasting in your hearing, but it is different, now. We are to act, not boast."

Old Harry seemed like a new person. He had cast off the manner which had made him so offensive to Essex, and was now very different. Essex did not get the idea that he was an honest man who had been playing the knave for effect, but that he was a knave whose conscience, or its equivalent, had been aroused by circumstances.

"I shall be glad to go shoulder to shoulder with you in this work," he replied.

"Done! Ho! our woman comes out. Now to follow."

The object of the veiled woman in going to the restaurant had been to get a cup of coffee, for she was so much wrought up that she had been ill. This done, she had come out, and she hurried away without delay.

Old Harry and Essex pursued secretly,

and, when she entered a waiting carriage a block distant, they secured a second vehicle and continued the pursuit.

"What are we to expect?" asked Bronson.

"I don't know," answered the detective.

"Why should any woman here be interested in Andrews—and yet, the question is foolish; he used to live in New York, and he may have known her well."

"Just what we want to do."

The pursuit was long, for it took them well up-town, but the woman, now free of her veil, finally alighted, and they followed her to a building devoted to flats, as they at once discovered.

"Rather a pretentious building," commented Bronson.

"Little is proved by that. If any class of structures in America holds a heterogeneous population it is the flats of New York. Good and bad are sheltered under one roof, and you can no more judge of the tenants by the walls and the style than you can of the color of their eyes by the same means."

"Shall we decide on more now?"

"The outer vestibule door is open, and though we can see no more of her, let us see what names are revealed there."

They entered the vestibule, and read the various rows of names. There did not seem to be any light therefrom.

"One place is vacant, and I suppose the corresponding flat is not occupied—"

Old Harry stopped short. The inner door had suddenly opened, and a keen-eyed boy of ten years stood before them. He had overheard the last words, and he quickly replied:

"No, sir; it isn't vacant, but the folks who live there took the card out, this morning."

"Ho!" returned the detective, "and what was the name on the card?"

"Rodman Stacey!"

CHAPTER XI.

A CLUE, AT LAST.

THE small boy was going to play, and he only paused to add:

"If it's he you want, just ring that bell and you'll get him."

With this finale the boy hurried off, and Old Harry Hawk turned his gaze upon his companion. He had seen nothing in the news thus gained, but he was at once impressed by the expression on Essex Bronson's face.

"What is the matter?" he inquired.

"What name did the boy give?"

"Rodman Stacey."

"Are you sure?"

"Yes. What of it?"

"Why, don't you know—"

Thus far Essex spoke impetuously; then he suddenly remembered that he had not fully taken Old Harry into his confidence, and he began to be cautious.

"Nothing," he replied.

"Nonsense, man! The name has special and striking significance to you. Why? Let me say that if there is anything whatever in it, there is suspicious significance, too, in the fact that the card was taken out this morning. Why did the tenant do it? Why, unless to foil just such searchers after light as we are?"

Essex was silent. With the examination of Paulus Andrews's private papers so fresh in his mind he could not help being strikingly impressed by the fact that the woman had gone into the flats, and it might be she had gone to that occupied by Rodman Stacey.

If she had they must be on the scent, for the name was not a common one—he doubted if another person in the city bore it.

Bronson stood silent and motionless so long that Old Harry finally took him by the sleeve.

"Come away!" requested the detective's side-partner.

Essex did not object, and they were soon well away from the flats. Then Old Harry stopped and looked his companion full in the face.

"Do I appear like a man who never did a good deed?" he asked.

"I see nothing to indicate such a possibility."

"Then can you trust me fully enough to join hands with me in this case? You know

I am Wageline's man, and I have told you what Wageline is. He's well known to crooks, and he shares in their plunder more than once. I do not know how such a man can go on and rank high as he does. He boasts of having a "pull." There are various claims as to where his power lies, but as I know nothing definite it is useless to speculate."

"Can it be with his police superiors?"

"No, no; they are not of that caliber. Politicians may, or may not, be his friends and protectors. Let us drop that—it does not matter. Now, as Wageline's man I have done wrongful work for him in the past. I confess it. Can you trust such a man?"

"Be more explicit. Trust you in what way?"

"I have sworn a mental oath to avenge Paulus Andrews's death."

"Ignoring Wageline?"

"Yes, and no. I must still keep in with him. In brief, I will seem still to be his man, but there will be work done of which he will have no knowledge."

"Good! I shall be glad to have you keep your word, Mr. Hawk."

"Do you trust me?"

"Yes."

"Then tell me all you know."

"I have not found out more about Andrews's death than you already know—"

"When the boy spoke the name of Rodman Stacey it had a special significance to you. Why?" swiftly asked Old Harry.

"I do not know Stacey—"

"You evade the point."

Essex gazed silently at his companion. Would it do to trust him fully? It was a decision forced upon him, and one which might win or lose all. Was Wageline's man to be trusted?

Old Harry faced him unwaveringly. The man appeared to have changed greatly in the last few hours. His half-rollicking, half-sneering manner had disappeared, and he was sensible, alert and earnest.

Essex remembered his singular conduct when he saw Andrews's face, and there was, it seemed, good reason to believe the explanation lay right there. At one moment he was on the point of referring to the matter, and asking for an explanation, but he thought better of it and said nothing.

Old Harry watched in silence for a while, and then quietly added:

"You can trust me!"

Bronson made a resolution.

"Come with me to my room," he directed, quickly.

They went, and there Essex produced the memorandum and other papers belonging to Paulus Andrews. As fully as he knew the situation, himself, he made it clear to Old Harry.

The latter's eyes gleamed brightly.

"Nothing could be clearer!" he declared.

"Andrews and this man Stacey were fellow inventors, and Stacey first planned to cheat Andrews out of his share and then, failing, killed him."

"So it looks to me."

"And Babe Brazier was the agent of the work. When it was known that Andrews was back in New York, Babe was hired to put him out of the way. Tim O'Killen made him drunk and decoyed him to Babe's, and then he was slain and the body taken to the roof where it was found. This would not be hard when we consider the situation of the two houses."

"They could use several intervening roofs to carry the body over."

"Yes."

"You figure it as I do. Moreover, it seems to me that Monks was sent abroad with him for the purpose of keeping him intoxicated, there, and thus keeping him from returning home. Possibly, it was the plan for Monks to kill his charge, but Monks died of fever, and Andrews was freed of his evil companion."

"Right, right!"

"With this starter we ought to get at the truth."

Old Harry leaned forward and clasped Essex's hand.

"We will!" he declared.

"What is the plan? How would it work for me to call on Rodman Stacey and see what he says—"

"Not for your life!" hastily cried Old

Harry. "Keep him ignorant of the movement against him. Fail not in this."

"I think you are right. What, then, is our course?"

"We believe Andrews was decoyed to Babe Brazier's."

"We do."

"It is a sailors' boarding-house."

"Yes."

"Then there must, I should say, have been sailors in when the work was done. We must learn as to that, and, if we find it so, see the sailors. The latter class is of all grades of decency and indecency, but most of them are honest fellows, and they would be good witnesses, if found."

"Can you see to this, Mr. Hawk?"

"I can, and will."

"Good!"

"Let matters rest right where they are until I look into the clue. Be cautious and prudent—there is more reason for prudence than rests with Rodman Stacey. Once let Wageline get track of our scheme and we shall have a cyclone howling at our heels. A dangerous man he would be if he saw danger of his professional standing being injured, and he would see it if he knew I was leagued against him."

"Well thought of, and you can rely on me to be careful."

"Who do you take this so-called veiled woman to be?"

"I don't know."

"I wish we had some person who could be put right into that building with Stacey, to watch him and the veiled woman."

"We have not."

"Not unless I can find some one. If it can be done, it shall. A spy in their own camp ought to learn something. We must think of that."

Some further conversation took place, and then Old Harry left the hotel and went his way. Essex, once more alone, meditated on the recent additions to the case. He was more encouraged than ever before. He felt inclined to trust Hawk fully, and he was even more certain that the eccentric aid was shrewd and skillful.

"Hope begins to dawn," he decided, after a long period of thought.

He went to the window and looked out. Night had fallen, and the overcast sky made it dark and gloomy.

A knock sounded at the door, and when he answered it he saw the landlord there in person.

"Mr. Bronson," said the latter, "there is a lady below who wants to see you. She asked to have the interview private, as she was a reporter for the daily press. I happened along, and, as her appearance was a sufficient recommendation, I took the matter in hand and thought I would let her come right to your room, unless you object. No doubt," was the addition, with a smile, "we shall see a column article on what you have to say that is wise and interesting."

He held out a card, and Bronson read the name.

As he suspected from the first, it was that of Minola Alden.

"You can have her sent up, if you wish," he answered, carelessly, not wishing to have it known he was to meet an acquaintance.

The landlord went away; Minola came.

"Of course I have taken you by surprise," she began.

"You are none the less welcome."

"I did not expect such good luck as to be allowed to see you in a room really private, but I thank that worthy landlord, for what I have to say is important."

"Please be seated. How important, Miss Alden?"

"I have news of Paulus Andrews."

CHAPTER XII.

THE SPY.

Essex was interested at once. Minola's manner was quiet, but she was a self-contained young lady, and it was not to be expected she would indulge in extravagant acts or speech under any circumstances.

"News of Paulus Andrews?" repeated Bronson. "That is good. What is the news?"

"I have located those who know of him," replied Minola.

"Ah! Who are they?"

"You shall hear. Of course," the woman reporter added, "in the following of my business calling I am led into all sorts of places and situations. This being understood I need not explain in detail how I happened to be sent out by the managing editor to write up a 'story' which compelled me to look at some patent records."

"I was looking for something granted to one John Brownley, but, as I searched, another name in the records struck my attention. It was that of Paulus Andrews."

"I looked for the cause, and found that he had invented something, and that the article was being manufactured. But he was not the only one to whom the patent was granted. A certain Rodman Stacey figured with him."

"Indeed!"

Essex was only politely interested. He remembered that Minola was not aware of his own discoveries which took Stacey in, and he did not expect her discoveries would reveal anything new to him.

His passive interest seemed to disappoint Minola.

"Don't you think what I have learned amounts to anything?" she inquired.

"Oh! I didn't think that, but I was waiting to hear all."

"By locating Andrews's fellow inventor we learn of somebody who knew him of old, you see."

"True."

"Consequently, we gain some tidings of him."

"Yes. Well, is that all?"

"No."

"What, more?"

"I have seen Rodman Stacey!"

"What?" cried Essex, startled.

"As soon as I learned what I have told you I hustled away to the residence of Stacey, which, luckily, was given in an appended paper of the documents, though not in the Directory, and I did see him."

"When?"

"I have just come from there."

"You've called on Stacey? Did you mention Andrews?"

"Certainly."

Bronson was disappointed. He and Old Harry had planned to keep Stacey ignorant of their campaign as long as possible, and now it was revealed to the suspected man that one person, if not the police, knew of his being identified with the dead man—so Bronson thought, and he was annoyed and worried.

Remaining calm, outwardly, he pursued:

"Well, what did Stacey say?"

"He did not give me much information. He stated that, some months before—a year and a half, I think he said—his attention had been called by a patent-agent to an invention made by a man too poor to even get it patented."

Wishing to have some kind of business on his hands, he took up with this chance, and he purchased a half-interest. Later, he bought the whole, and since then he had known nothing of Andrews.

Bronson's eyes had opened wide.

"Bought the whole?"

"Yes."

"The dickens he had!"

"So he said."

Bronson meditated, and then resumed:

"Well, that would not prevent him from identifying Andrews, if such a thing was necessary—"

"But he says he cannot do it."

"Why not?"

"He never saw Andrews."

"Well, well, what next?"

"He stated that all his dealings were with the patent-agent, as Andrews was out of the city, or so represented, and, as luck would have it, he had never met Andrews, and had no idea of what he looked like."

"Say," cried Essex, "did you believe all this talk?"

"I don't know," admitted Minola. "At times I felt a doubt of Mr. Rodman Stacey, and was tempted to express it, but I kept still, and I'm not even now prepared to say how much, or how little, I believe."

Again Essex meditated, and then he slowly asked:

"Are you going to write this up for your paper?"

"Such was my idea."
 "I want you to refrain."
 "Why?"

"If I present logical reasons why you should refrain, will you not only do it, but keep wholly silent as to matters I tell you?"

"Decidedly, yes."

"Then you shall know what I have discovered. We have floated into this business together, Miss Alden, and we may have a future in it, too. You are a woman of brains, and there's no telling what you may yet do, if we are willing to be patient, rather than rush into print at once. Hear my story."

Bronson had learned to admire Minola; he believed he could trust her; and, even if he had been less sanguine, there was a reason why he should confide in her. Her reporter's zeal must be held in check.

Plainly but briefly he told what he knew of Rodman Stacey, and then they discussed the situation fully.

Discussion did not help Stacey in their estimation, and Minola summed it all up when she observed:

"He has been, and is, playing a deep game. He plotted to get Paulus Andrews's money, and is still plotting."

"He lied to you at your interview with him."

"He did!" Minola agreed.

"He lied when he said he never had seen Andrews, and he lied again when he said he had purchased the whole concern. Andrews's memorandum shows that he was worrying about his share—the last words in the record tell that—and this would not have been had he sold out. I wish you had asked Stacey who the patent agent was who transacted business between him and Andrews."

"I did ask him, and he told me. More, my way after I left Stacey was past the office of the agent, and I called there."

"Good! With what result?"

"The patent agent died two months ago."

"Wily Stacey! He named a dead man so he would not be found out."

"Such does seem to have been his object."

"Miss Alden, there can be no doubt about this. Stacey is a villain of the worst sort. He conspired to rob Andrews, and sent him out of the country under charge of his own agent, Monks. When Andrews reached home, he was murdered by Stacey. There is no other way to account for it."

"We are facing a serious case," remarked Minola, gravely.

"We are, surely."

"What can we do?"

"We?"

"If it be possible, I am going to give my aid. Undoubtedly, Stacey has fortified his position as well as he can, but he may not be impregnable, if he has bought up Wage-line."

"Did you see a woman at the flat?"

"No."

"I think the veiled woman of our case resides there, too."

"It is unfortunate that there is a woman, as well as a man, banded against us. What a designing man and a woman of the same caliber cannot plot out, together, must be impossible to crime."

"We match them in that we are a woman and a man, whether we do in cunning or not."

"You bring to my mind a half-formed plan which has been there for some minutes. Stacey has a flat. Why can't I locate in another flat of the same building, and see what can be done?"

"You forget that Stacey has seen you."

"If I can't disguise myself so he won't know me another time I am weak, indeed!" declared Minola.

"Perhaps it can be done."

"It can, and it shall, if we think best, later on. Anyhow, we are in this case to win, and I think it will go hard with Rodman Stacey, yet."

"Bravo! I like the combination, and we'll see what will come of it!" exclaimed Essex, quickly.

The conversation was continued for some time longer, but, as they could do nothing radical, then, they finally decided to drop matters until another occasion. The hour was fast getting late, and Minola felt that it was time for her to get home.

Of course Essex went along as her escort.

Nothing occurred on the journey that was of importance, as far as they saw, and they parted at the door of her boarding-house—a house and a vicinity by no means elegant, for she had a furnished room in a building where other professional persons made their home, and nobody cared for system.

As Bronson turned away from the door he caught sight of an object which, as it were, flashed across his vision for a moment and then disappeared. He did not need to be told what it was—it had been a human being dodging into a doorway, and, beyond the glimpse, Essex had no view of it, nor did it reappear.

Ordinarily, he would have thought nothing of it, for it might have been merely a boy without more than a boyish object, but recent events had put him in a mood to be suspicious.

"Was it a spy?"

This was his mental question, and he became interested. He was too shrewd to go to the spot and demand an explanation, but he determined to have light.

"Miss Alden and I never looked behind us," he thought, further. "I wonder if we have been followed? If Stacey is what we take him to be he may have followed her right from his own residence, and now have some evil purpose in mind."

Anxious to solve this question, Bronson went on and passed the doorway quietly. He did not turn his head, but, as he went by, he sent a quick glance and saw a man in covert.

Without betraying himself the young man continued and disappeared at the end of the block as if nothing was on his mind, but he went only a few steps beyond the corner.

Wheeling, he crept close to the corner and looked back.

The unknown prowler stood at the door of Minola's home.

"That threatens mischief!" muttered Essex. "He is going to break in, I reckon, and that surely means projected harm to her. I'll see it out!"

CHAPTER XIII.

THE NIGHT PROWLER.

THE supposed spy tried the door, but it did not yield to his touch. Then he stepped back a pace and surveyed the house critically, seeking, as Essex believed, to see where a light might be burning. In this he was successful, for, at one point, a room which had been dark suddenly became light.

"He has the clue," muttered Bronson. "What will he do next?"

The speaker was not kept in suspense long. The spy made his way to the balcony and tried the window, but this was fastened, too. His purpose was not to be accomplished so easily, it seemed.

Unfortunately for the security of those in the house there was a vacant lot to one side, where a building had been pulled down and not yet replaced with another. The spy seemed to see something in this fact, for he left the front of the house and passed into the lot.

Essex left his position, but when he gained view of the lot there was no sign of the spy.

"What am I to do now?" wondered Bronson. "If I go forward I run the risk of immediate discovery, and that will alarm the fellow before he has shown his hand fully. Well, what of it? He has a lawless purpose, and it matters not how soon I am seen, perhaps; I shall have enough to charge him with. Anyhow, I must not remain idle and let him force an entrance."

Actuated by this decision Essex went into the lot, himself, and then cautiously approached the rear of the building.

He peered around the corner.

The spy had disappeared.

For a moment Essex was nonplused, but he was not long in gaining light on the disappearance. Plainly, the spy would not go so far only to back out then, and there was but one other way to account for the situation. Bronson had allowed him some time, and he had improved it to enter the building.

"This must be seen to!"

With this decision the watcher walked quickly toward the rear of the house. As he had expected he found a window open, and with this clue he could not be at fault as to where his game had gone.

Essex listened at the window and heard nothing, and, as it was dark beyond, his eyes told him just as little.

"What shall I do?" he mused. "I can't let him pursue his course, for he may succeed in entering Miss Alden's room. It's a risky thing to follow a desperate man into a house he has feloniously entered, yet I believe that is just what I will do. I must check him somehow."

A moment more of hesitation, and then the decision was made. He stepped inside the house, and was fully committed to the venture.

"I am liable to get arrested, myself, for this work, I suppose, and I might find it hard to prove that my intentions were good, but it is too late to back out."

The speaker was aware that he was in a wide hall, but he knew not the situation of affairs beyond. Luckily for him he was given a little information as there was a slight sound of collision above, followed by a half-subdued groan. The spy had run against something, and the shock had not been pleasant.

To Essex it was an advantage, for he knew, or believed he did, just where the spy was to be found. He sought for and found the stairway, and then moved quietly but quickly up, his own recklessness being even greater than that of the spy, for he had more to fear. A housebreaker like the spy, detected, is a dangerous person to meet at night. Essex, however, hoped to avoid being discovered until he was himself ready to spring his trap.

Once in the upper hall he was no better off than before, for he could not see or hear anything, but he stood still and waited.

Minutes passed, and he grew suspicious of the delay. He had expected that the spy would try to enter Miss Alden's room, and in order to do that it seemed he would have to pick the lock.

No sound told that he was going to do this, and, as he had located the room before leaving the street, and would not be likely to remain in idleness in the hall when he could work, the lull impressed Essex as strange.

"Has he seen me and gone into ambush, or has he given me the slip and contrived to do his work ahead of my time?"

Bronson remembered that housebreakers usually have dark lanterns, and this troubled him. While he could see nothing in the hall, the other intruder might have seen all immediately by flashing the light, and then moved to the next step.

"I will remain idle no longer."

With this decision Essex started. Slowly he passed along the hall, eyes and ears strained to the utmost, and each moment expecting an attack from the spy.

It was not a pleasant feeling, and he was excusable for being influenced by it a good deal. The silence was oppressive, but not so bad as what might come. What did the darkness hide? Was an assassin there?

Hark! Was that a rustling of garments? He stopped short. Only silence, deep and profound. So still was everything else that he even fancied he could hear his own cautious breathing—so strong was the force of imagination.

Again! He had been about to start, but he was checked by the belief that some one had moved near him. Was the knife of a desperate housebreaker even then raised over him?

Fancies like these made his situation painful, but he suddenly threw off the invisible fear.

"My imagination runs riot with me," he thought; "I am nervous. This will not do. I'll go on—Ah!"

This time there was a sound, surely, but it was not in his own quarter—plainly enough, it was in a room beyond.

Realizing the facts, in part, he immediately felt for a door and found it. He entered an apartment, and then paused again. He and the spy were playing hide-and-seek where discovery might send both to the city prison—not much more inviting than the knife of the housebreaker.

What next?

The answer came quickly, and Essex started as he saw a band of light flash through the darkness; the spy had uncovered a dark-lantern.

Bronson had him located, at last, and he moved quickly forward, determined to lose no time. Almost to the side of the man he went, and though the light had been shut off as quickly as it was shown, he knew he could touch his fellow prowler. This he did not do, however; there was something far too interesting to the sight beyond.

Evidently, the spy had followed up his uncovering of the light by opening another door, and when this was done his lantern was not needed.

A lighted room was beyond, and in the room was Minola Alden, unconscious of the danger which menaced her.

She had seated herself at a table above which hung the chandelier, and was there engaged in looking at her papers. Side by side the two men, the spy and her friend, stood and watched her.

Whatever the papers were they engrossed her attention wholly, and as she bent over them she heard nothing, saw nothing else. That it was something connected with her calling as a woman reporter was not to be doubted, and her rapt air told how much this calling was to her.

She made a pretty picture then, and Bronson, at least, appreciated it. His gaze wandered to the spy. What did that person think, and what did he intend to do?

To a certain extent he gave light at once. He moved forward and stood in the room. Minola's back was partially toward him, and she saw nothing of the intrusion. As for hearing anything, his supreme skill in moving explained why Essex had heard nothing in the hall. The spy seemed to be gifted with velvet feet.

Somewhat back of her chair he paused, and his eyes took in all the room could show. Bronson remained passive and watched further. There was nothing to indicate that the intruder meditated harm to her, and Essex was curious to know just what he did want.

If his purpose could be revealed by his own act, the origin of the danger would be revealed, too. Much as Essex deprecated any delay that would put Minola in peril he was anxious to have the intruder show his hand.

Having surveyed the room fully the spy again turned his gaze upon its mistress. He stared at her with eyes that began to brighten as he looked, and it was not hard to see that his admiration was aroused. But she studied the papers and remained unconscious of the survey.

Suddenly he seemed to bestir himself and moved toward her. Carefully and silently he advanced, and Essex grew so nervous that he was about to uncover himself and appear as her defender when she broke the pause, herself.

She had heard the creeper, at last, and she leaped to her feet with a little cry more womanly than business-like.

Wheeling, she stood face to face with the spy.

The pause which ensued was full of dramatic force. Neither spoke, but they looked at each other with the eloquence which silence often has, and Bronson forgot that he was an actor in the scene. Minola had grown pale, but she manifested surprising coolness, outwardly.

"What are you doing here?" she demanded.

The spy did not reply, and she was left to consider what appeared to be the facts of the case—that she was alone at that hour in the house with a man whose face was that of a ruffian, and his apparel fitted for the rag-bag, rather than decent society.

Surely, she had reason to be alarmed, and her outward coolness did not hide the fear which grew upon her.

"Speak!" she added; "why are you here?"

CHAPTER XIV.

DUSTY DAN'S MASTER.

THE spy recovered his tongue.

"Don't be skeered," he replied. "I ain't goin' ter do ye no harm, miss. Don't be alarmed."

"No harm?" Minola echoed. "Then why are you here?"

"Wal, ye see, I've took a room here, an'—"

"That is false!" she cried, quickly.

"Oh! ye know, do ye?"

"Yes."

"Hope you'll grow stout on it!" growled the spy, sullenly.

"Your intrusion will profit you nothing. This house is full of people, and I have but to call and I shall bring abundant aid. I am going to call, too."

"Much good it would do ye. I know this house—it's the place o' hangin' out fer folks who is all late workers, and blessed few are in now. Help wouldn't come as you think, an' ef it did, I am able ter deal with 'em all. See?"

He suddenly uncovered a slung-shot, and then as suddenly added:

"But don't be skeered; I won't harm ye."

"Why are you here?" Minola repeated.

"What are them papers?" and he pointed with a dirty finger to the documents on the table.

"Nothing of money value."

"Give 'em ter me!"

"But they would be of no use to you."

"Don't argue—give 'em over!"

"Since you are so persistent, I will say they are my notes for an article on the sufferings of the poor in the lower wards of the city, and to be written up for the press."

"Bosh!"

"Could you use them?"

"I will take them."

"Sir, you labor under a wrong impression; I assure you they have no money value until written up, and only to me, then. Do not be foolish; if you are here to rob me, here is my ring—"

"Shoot the ring! I don't want it."

"Then what is your object?"

"I want all the papers you have around here, an' I am goin' ter have them. Don't think you kin keep me chinnin' until help comes fer you, fer it won't work. Gal, I don't want ter hurt ye, fer you're a pretty critter ter look at, but I am here fer biz. Shell out, or take this!"

He gave the slung-shot a flourish, and then suddenly seized Minola by the arm.

"Shell out!" he repeated.

She uttered another little cry, and tried to break away, but he held her fast.

"Shall I have to slug ye?" he demanded, savagely. "Shall I hit ye with this weapon?"

He swung it above his head, and then—it was snatched from his grasp without warning. He wheeled like a flash; before him stood Essex Bronson, his face full of anger and contempt.

"You coward!" exclaimed the young man; "would you strike a woman?"

"The spy's hand fell to his pocket, but as he perceived that Essex stood impassive he checked the motion.

"Who in thunder has done it?" he growled.

"You were about to."

"That was talk, old man."

"We will talk in a different way. You may postpone your purpose, for you will sleep in prison the rest of the week."

Minola had been as much surprised by the appearance of her champion as she had been by that of the spy, but she began to recover quickly, and the color returned to her cheeks.

"Who is this man?" she demanded.

"A housebreaker—I know no more of him. Wait until his pedigree is taken at the police station."

"Hold on!" cried the spy.

"What is it?"

"I ain't no burglar."

Essex did not believe he was, and in the fellow's anxiety to clear himself of that charge he saw ground for hope.

"Of course you are," he replied.

"No, sir!"

"Then why are you here?"

"Not ter rob nobody."

"Possibly they will believe that at the police station."

"See here! Be you goin' ter jug me?"

"Yes."

The spy looked around with the air of a run-down wolf. He evidently had due respect for the troubles of being arrested, and he did not want to meet with that fate. If he had been possessed of a yielding spirit possibly Essex had done ill to speak so positively of having him arrested. Anyhow, the ugliness in his nature found vent.

Again his hand moved toward his pocket—this time with surprising rapidity, and when it came out a revolver flashed in the light.

"This is my answer!"

He turned the weapon on Essex, and Minola uttered a cry of terror, but Bronson had not drifted around the world so many years without having learned to care for himself in a tight place.

Promptly he flung himself upon the spy, and the revolver was caught in time to prevent the shot. Each man then grasped it, and a struggle for its possession began which was fierce and determined.

Minola was terribly alarmed, for she knew the weapon might be discharged by mistake as well as by design, and either possibility was liable to cost her champion his life.

She tried to help him, but the rapid movements of the men prevented anything of the kind.

Essex found he had to deal with a man of muscle, and he soon had enough of the fight as it was. He thought he knew of a better way, and sought to put it into execution.

He tripped the spy, and, as the latter fell heavily to the floor, fell upon him.

The shock was too much for the spy's grip on the revolver—it fell to the floor. Then Minola had her chance; she quickly secured the weapon, and when Essex deftly turned the spy over on his back and sat on him, she presented the revolver to her friend.

"Try the virtue of this!" she coolly suggested.

Bronson did not feel the need of the help, and he did not take it, but his hold on the spy grew to be that of a master. The latter struggled in vain, and then relaxed his muscles with sullen submission.

"You see what you have come to," remarked Essex.

"I wouldn't think et, but you've got more strength than me," agreed the house-breaker.

"Now you see prison ahead of you, sure, don't you?"

The spy hesitated, and then his eyes brightened again.

"Not ef you are reasonable."

"Why do you say that?"

"It won't do you no good ter lock me up, an' ef you don't do that, I kin kelp you—help this lady, I mean."

"How?"

"I was sent here, an' I kin tell you who did it all. That will be worth something to her, an' et won't ter shut me up."

Essex looked at Minola. He had been working for just this. He questioned her with his expression, and received a nod in return.

"Prove your sincerity, and we can be friends," Bronson then promised.

"You'll let me go?"

"If you deserve it."

"Here goes, then. I am Dusty Dan Riggs, an' I was on the street, this eve, when a feller I knew hustled up ter me. He was a well-dressed party, but he an' me knew each other as crooks."

"See that gal ahead?" he asked me.

"I do," says I.

"I've been follerin' her," says he, "but I want ter shift the job. Will you do et for me?"

"I says I would, an' he added that there was money in et fer me."

"Go where she goes," says he, "an' ef the chance offers, break in where she lives an' steal all the papers you kin find in her possession. Mind you," says he, "they are written documents. Take 'em all, an' I will see what is of value ter me when you bring them."

"While he talked we had been keepin' pace with the gal, but as soon as he seen I was fully onter the game he left me, an' I come on alone. Then I broke in. That's all; I wa'n't after money, nor ter harm this gal. See?"

Essex believed he did see.

"Who was this man?" he inquired.

"Do I go free ef I tell?"

"Yes."

"His name was Rod Stacey."

The secret was out, and they were done with Dusty Dan. He was questioned until it was certain he had no more to reveal, and then he called for the carrying out of the programme, as far as it related to himself.

Leaving him for the time, Bronson saw Minola privately.

"You see what we have to meet in the person of Mr. Stacey," he quietly observed.

"He thought to shut off all publicity."

"Such was his idea. Of course he does not know how strong a force is opposed to him, and he simply saw you as you were—a woman likely to injure him. If you had been alone in this matter, and he could have secured the papers you might have, he would have reaped quite a harvest. Working in the dark as he was, he could not know it would do him no good, of course."

"I am likely to hear from him again."

"I do not think you need fear violence. When he sees there is no immediate crash he will be influenced by the fact that you are a woman, I trust. It would be different if you were a man."

Minola felt that this was said to reassure her, and that the security he hoped for would not be hers. Ignoring the matter of personal danger, she added:

"Be that as it may, we are now situated so it is a settled fight with Stacey."

"You are right. In one sense it will be a fight in open land, but we have a masked battery. Old Harry Hawk will be in the struggle, and he is not suspected. I hope much from him. Now, the hour grows very late, and I will leave you and escort our unwelcome visitor out."

It was done, and Essex and Dusty Dan soon stood on the street.

"Are you going back to Stacey's to report?" asked Bronson.

"No. I'm done with him," replied the rough.

Essex doubted it, but it would do no good to urge the point, so he gave Dan a five-dollar bank-note for telling them the facts, and then gave him permission to go.

Dan went promptly. Did his era of mischief end with his departure?

CHAPTER XV.

A STRANGE EXPERIENCE.

ESSEX moved homeward, but he went in a mood of deep thought.

"The battle is on with Stacey," he mused. "He knows he is threatened now, and he will act accordingly. Minola he has marked fully, and he will not be long in learning that I am with her in the work. I shall not try to hide it. Old Harry Hawk can well afford to remain unknown, for he can do the best service in secret, but I will openly try to help the case on. That means a struggle between Stacey and myself, and I suspect my life will always be in danger. So be it—I will cheerfully fight it out with Rodman Stacey."

Thinking thus the young man continued his way until he reached the lower part of the city.

He was traversing a lonely street when he was suddenly hailed.

"Hullo, boss!"

Essex looked up and saw a boy with a quantity of suspenders on his arm, and a grin on his small, sharp face.

"Don't ye know me?" added the youth.

"I saw you at the house where Andrews was killed."

"Right you be, mister; I am Chimmie Dunn. Want a pair o' suspenders, ter-night?"

"I am not in need."

"Sorry, boss, but I kin stand the pressure. I've been workin' Fulton Ferry, this eve, an' I've reaped quite a harvest. Guess the Brooklyn folks don't usually wear suspenders, but when I showed them there was such a thing they put out their rocks quite free."

Chimmie was in a jovial mood, and when Essex had talked with him further, and then moved on, the boy kept step with him.

"Funny about that murder case, ain't it?" finally asked Chimmie.

"What is funny?"

"How he got on the house-top where he was killed."

"Yes."

"He was hit right there, boss, I am thinkin'. His enemy laid fer him and gave him a rap with a club, an' down dropped Paulus. That is jest the figger. But who did it?"

Bronson did not answer. He had not had his mind very closely on his course, except that, in a general way, it was toward home,

but he was brought to a realization of his exact situation by sight of a familiar building.

It was that in which the undertaker had his office who was in care of Paulus Andrews's remains.

He did not comment to Chimmie, and they were walking on when the sound of a carriage caused the suspender-seller to look around.

"Hullo! they stop by the undertaker's place. Can't be they are goin' ter bury a man at this hour, kin it?"

Essex paused. Looking back he saw the carriage by the building, and as he still watched, he saw men get out of it and, after looking around as if to be sure they were not under survey, hurry into the alley which was on one side of the office.

"Jiminy! ef they hadn't come in a wagon I should say they was burglars," observed Chimmie. "They are mighty sly about it."

"So they are."

"Hadrn't we better tell the perleece?"

"As you say, burglars would not come in a carriage."

"But they may hev some other game afoot. Mebbe they are goin' ter steal a body out o' the shop."

The suggestion made Essex start. He believed Paulus Andrews's body to be yet in the place, and though he could see no reason why any one should wish to steal it, the suggestion was full of food for thought. Plainly, the persons noticed had some work in view which would not bear the light of day.

The secrecy with which they were conducting the matter proved that.

"Hullo!" pursued Chimmie, "they are backin' the carriage inter the alley."

"A body is to be taken out, I really believe."

"Yes, an' stole."

"Are you sure?"

"I be that."

"Jimmy, I have a mind to see more of this."

"Boss, I'm with ye, by jinks! Come along with me, an' we will investigate the job. We don't want no body-snatchers ter hev a picnic right under our eyes. Come on!"

Chimmie had the fervor of youth, and he was now all alive to the possibilities of the case. He would have made a rush, but Essex kept him in check.

There was, it seemed, little hope of being very secret, but it must be tried. Circumstances proved it to be easier than they had expected. When the mouth of the alley was reached Chimmie whispered:

"Say, the team is gone!"

"By Jove! is that so? I didn't see it, but—"

"Hold on, boss! Now I see further, I observe that there is a big box in there, an' it dawns on me they may be behind the box."

"Well explained. They have backed in, and screened their team with the box. No doubt they knew of it ere they came."

"What now, mister?"

"Come with me, and be silent as the grave."

"I will, an' twice as dangerous."

Nothing could dampen Chimmie's zeal, and he was all on the alert as he followed Essex close to the box. The team was distinctly seen then. It was headed toward the street, ready for quick departure when needed, one would say.

"Where's the men?" whispered Chimmie.

"Don't you see there is a door which leads from the alley to the shop, and that it is open?"

"Correct, by jinks. Be they all in?"

"So it seems."

"Then let us go, too."

"Come! Be careful."

Thus directing, Bronson walked toward the door as cautiously as possible. He regretted that he was not armed with a revolver, but the slung-shot acquired from Dusty Dan was his only weapon, and he had never used anything of the sort.

The unknown persons seemed to have risked all on the security of the box in the alley, for none of them were there, and when the door was reached, the challenge which was to be feared did not come. Sounds were audible in the room, and Essex peered around the corner.

He saw three persons, all of whom were moving about.

This room was that which Bronson had not seen on his first visit, but which had been referred to by Old Harry Hawk as one where the undertaker kept the remains of those who "died natural deaths," when he had occasion to store them.

Just now several coffins were there, and the intruders were busy seeking to examine them. Suddenly one of the party straightened up and spoke impatiently:

"They are all empty."

"There is another room," suggested one of his allies.

"Yes. Come there."

Essex looked at the speaker sharply. He believed there was something familiar in the voice, but there was not in the appearance of the man. Essex saw a profusion of gray hair and beard, straggling and untrimmed, and over the face was a big slouched hat, and a pair of spectacles which barely showed. The wearer was not tall, but he had a corpulent form, and seemed awkward and unwieldy.

He led his comrades into the rear room.

It was there that Essex had seen the body of Paulus Andrews.

"Boss, le's go out!" urged Chimmie.

"We will see it out. For your life, don't make any noise."

"Not a pound of it."

They crossed the floor, and again had a view of the intruders. The latter were surveying the inner room. The gaze of the man with the big beard strayed to the coffin which stood on the table in mid floor—the same in which Paulus Andrews lay, or had recently lain—and Bronson grew deeply interested. What meant all this? Who were these men? What did they want there?

The man with the big beard went close to the coffin, and then paused and gazed at the object fixedly. The moments wore on and he did not move, whereupon one of his companions grew impatient.

"Be you goin' ter sleep?" he demanded.

The big bearded man started.

"No," he replied.

"Then don't act like it. We are liable ter get nabbed at any time, an' this delay is fool-work."

"You are right. We will go on—as soon as I make sure this is the right man."

The speaker advanced to the coffin and lifted the cover. Was it imagination, or did Essex see him shiver as he did so? Be that as it might, he appeared nervous, and the watcher's interest increased. Paulus Andrews's case was bringing many strange features, and this was among the strangest. What meant this night visit to the coffin of the dead? It was mysterious and uncanny.

One look he of the big beard took, and then he dropped the cover and pulled the hat lower over his eyes.

"Proceed!" he directed, in a hushed voice.

The other men promptly seized upon the coffin, and it was lifted and borne toward the door. Their purpose was no longer in doubt.

Bronson stepped quickly from cover.

"Stop!" he commanded, sharply.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE BODY-STEALERS.

THE command fell with startling force on the ears of the body-stealers, and the men who bore the coffin came to a full stop. Essex stood in their path, and there was not the best of opportunities to pass, even if they had been situated right for flight. They were coarse, ignorant-looking fellows, but their faces were now eloquent with the force of their dismay.

He who seemed to be their leader was pretty nearly covered up by his big hat, but he showed like alarm.

Bronson gave them but little time to think. Stepping forward he seized hold of the hat belonging to the leader and tore it from his head. Another motion and the gray beard was snatched from his face—it was false.

"Jiminy crickets!" exclaimed Chimmie Dunn, wonderingly.

Surprised he was, for, with this additional view, even the masculine clothes did not prevent him from seeing a certain fact.

The gray-bearded "man" was a woman! To Essex this was less of a surprise. He had suspected the truth from the first, despite the efforts of the woman to use a masculine voice as an accompaniment to her attire.

With the face revealed he discovered even more.

The woman was Daisy Edwards.

"The jig is up!" cried one the body-stealers. "Scoot!"

He dropped one end of the coffin, so that the thing slid off his shoulder, and then dashed out of the door. His companions started to follow. Chimmie Dunn got in the way only to be bowled over and landed in the corner, and when that youth had picked himself up both men had made good their retreat.

"Say, boss!" cried the suspender-seller, "the blokes is off the perch an' still hump-in'."

"Never mind them," replied Essex. "Our game is here."

Daisy was not hardened in wild life, and she had lost her nerve in the midst of this disappointment and danger. She stood before Bronson with the air of one completely crushed.

Essex took his cue from her condition.

"Madam," he suddenly, sharply exclaimed, "you are beaten in your nefarious work."

"I—I have done nothing," she faltered.

"Is it nothing to steal a body?"

"My motive was good."

"To sell it to some medical college?"

"No, no; simply to give it a decent burial."

"Oh!"

"It is true; I swear it."

"Why are you interested?"

"He was a human being."

"Why not bury him openly?"

"I could not."

"I shall have to believe that a falsehood unless you convince me."

"Unfortunately, I cannot do that."

"Why not?"

"Sir, I cannot explain, but I beg you will deal with me leniently; I did not intend any harm."

Bronson did some quick thinking. He saw he was not going to get a confession by talking as he was doing and he determined on resolute measures. The conspirators must soon know him as their foe, if they did not do so already—why mince matters now?

"Madam," he abruptly continued, "if you want to bury Paulus Andrews because he was partner of Rodman Stacey, what is the need of all this secrecy? Why does not Stacey come here in person? Why do you take the hour of night, instead of day, to do your own work? What is all this mystery about, anyhow?"

Daisy lost nothing that was visible on the face of this address.

"Who are you who claims to know so much of this?" she demanded.

"If you have read the papers well you have seen mention made of a man who returned to New York with Andrews, and who identified Andrews after he was killed. That man was Essex Bronson, and I am he."

Plainly, Daisy found food for alarm in these words.

"Then why are you here?" she faltered.

"Because I saw you here."

"You do not know me—"

"Wrong! You are the companion of Rodman Stacey, wife, or housekeeper, as it may be; and you are hand in glove with him. Woman, why do you and he seek to bury Andrews secretly—"

"Rodman Stacey does not know I am here."

"What! do you play a lone hand?"

"Yes."

"What is your peculiar interest in Andrews?"

"He was alone, friendless—"

"Why does not Stacey come to the aid of his neglected body?"

"I don't know."

Essex seized the woman by the arm.

"You know more than you reveal, madam!" he declared. "Tell me the mystery of all this. You are not wholly in sympathy with Stacey, it seems, or you would not be here

to do this work on the sly. Do you disapprove of his neglect of Andrews? Speak out, for the time is passing, and a policeman may put in an appearance and take you to prison. The moments fly. Do not lose your chance to go free; speak before it is too late. What have you to confess?"

"Confess? Nothing, sir; nothing."

"Beware!"

"Do you threaten?"

"I simply remind you that a policeman may come at any minute. Speak! What is Andrews to you?"

"Nothing. How dare you insinuate he was?"

"Then why are you here without Mr. Stacey?"

Daisy was silent. She was beginning to recover her nerve, threatening as circumstances were, but she did not see the way out of the dilemma. If Essex was stubborn, there was no way out.

"Speak!" he added.

"I have nothing to say."

"Jiminy! there's a perleeceman!"

So cried Chimmie Dunn, and Daisy looked toward the door with a nervous start, but she saw nobody. Chimmie had ventured on a trick, for he had seen no officer whatever. Essex realized the situation, and quickly added:

"That was all your imagination, Jimmie, but it remains a fact that this sort of thing cannot long continue. A policeman is sure to come, and when he does it will go hard with you, madam. Will you not save yourself? Come! Speak before it is too late."

She remained silent, and Bronson caught her arm.

"Speak!" he reiterated.

The desired chance had come and gone. Daisy had been startled, and almost on the point of weakening, but the delay had enabled her to recover somewhat. Through no fault of her companions, the period of susceptibility had drifted away.

Now, she grew cunning.

"I can tell nothing here," she replied. "I can't collect myself enough to tell a thing, or see what safety requires of me. Let me leave this horrible place, and then I will listen to you."

"Lil the Lamplighter lives only a bit away from here; we kin go ter John Maines's dommysoil," suggested Chimmie.

Essex had his doubts of Daisy, but he was himself anxious to get away from the undertaker's shop. If it would go hard with her to be found there, it might be the same with him.

"Your wishes shall be obeyed, madam," he promised, "but let me caution you against any tricks. Unless you act the reasonable part we will yet hand you over to the police."

"That is fair."

Bronson looked at her sharply, but he made no remonstrance. He then bent his gaze upon the coffin. He did not wish to leave it where it was, and he called upon Chimmie to help him. Their united efforts sufficed to put it back in place. Nothing remained to tell of the recent events but the open door. This could not be locked, but they went out and closed it after them.

Chimmie was directed to lead the way to John Maines's, and this he did without delay.

On the way but little was said. Daisy remained passive, but there was such a suggestion of sullenness in her manner that Bronson believed they were throwing themselves against a metaphorical stone wall in their efforts to subdue her.

He had some doubts of Chimmie's ability to rouse the Maines family without stirring up the whole neighborhood, but the suspender-seller knew what he was about. From an ash barrel he collected a quantity of sharp cinders, and, when he had sent a number of them against a certain window, it was opened by Lil the Lamplighter, herself.

At Chimmie's request she admitted them.

They soon stood in the main room of the humble two occupied by John Maines. He was sleeping peacefully in the second, and their arrival was unknown to him.

Thus far all had been done in the dark, but Lil hastened to find the kerosene lamp and the gloom was soon dispelled dimly.

The flickering light showed Daisy pas-

sive, but her facial expression was so manifestly stubborn that Essex lost what hope he had felt.

Yet, he went on with the attempt.

Choosing his words with care, so as not to allow her to learn too much of the actual situation of affairs, and never hinting that he suspected she or Stacey had taken any part in the slaying of Andrews, he let her know that he was aware that Stacey had been the partner of Andrews, and that she was Stacey's friend; and then he plainly stated his opinion that their failure to come forward and claim the body openly, followed by her attempt to get it secretly, indicated some guilty secret.

In conclusion, he avowed his purpose to look into the matter, and he advised her to escape being dragged down with Stacey, if there was anything which would injure him in a possible revelation.

All this Daisy heard, but she smiled when he finished.

"You assume too much, sir," she replied.

"There is no guilty secret as far as I know."

"Then why do you try to steal the body at night?"

"Simply to give it decent burial."

"You need only have gone to the coroner with your money to do that."

"I didn't know it."

"That is false."

"Sir?"

"Every intelligent person knows she would be allowed to see a body decently buried, no matter whose it might be, if he was otherwise friendless. You speak falsely when you give such an excuse."

Daisy's eyes flashed.

"That statement ends our talk; I will speak with you no more. I will go— What? Merciful heavens! who is this?"

CHAPTER XVII.

▲ MEMENTO OF MURDER.

DAISY had resolved to defy Bronson, and as she began to answer him she turned away with an air of disdain. The movement brought her face to face with Lil the Lamplighter, and then came the break in her speech.

From the beginning of the interview she had taken little notice of the child, and the dim light had not made any face very distinct. Lil, however, had been prodding the lamp to increase the blaze, and she had succeeded so well that the room had grown much lighter.

Thus, Daisy had a good view of her, and when she gained the view she had shrunk away with the almost incoherent words which ended her speech.

She was regarding Lil sharply, and with a frightened air.

"Child, where did you come from?" she added, her voice tremulous with emotion of some sort.

"You're the one who come," retorted Lil, promptly.

"Are you a ghost, or are you—"

Daisy stopped short, and Lil calmly replied:

"If you think I'm a ghost, jest pinch me. See w'ot I will do, then!"

Essex Bronson stood quiet, but he was losing nothing. He saw that Daisy had fallen to trembling, and he was perplexed anew. He made no haste to gain light, but let the drama go on.

"Were you here when we came?" asked Daisy.

"Why, didn't I let you in?" returned Lil.

"Was it you?"

"Sure-pop!"

"And your name is—"

"Lil Maines. W'ot of it? Seems ter break you all up, somehow. W'ot is there about a kid like me that need to aggeritate ye so?"

The woman made another start, and her gaze was turned quickly on Essex. Then she rallied.

"You startled me by being so near when I turned around, child."

"Oh! did I? Come, now, that won't go down. You knew I was here. Is my face so homely that I scare folks out of their wits when they see me, or what bug have you got in yer bunnit?"

Lil spoke in the free-and-easy manner of her rank in life, and was not inclined to see more in the event than a passing peculiarity. As for Daisy, she had been allowed time to recover, and she did recover well. She once more bent her gaze upon Bronson.

"Well," she added, "what next?"

Essex did not see fit to refer to the recent agitation on her part.

"Madam," he answered, quietly, "there is much about this matter which I do not understand. I do not accuse any one of bad faith, but I do not see the object of your peculiar course. Paulus Andrews was business partner with Rodman Stacey, yet he does not appear to take charge of the body. Then you come and try to steal it. This may be some new fashion in New York, but it does not meet with my approval. However, I am not going to arrest you. You are a free woman."

Her face brightened with gratified surprise.

"Can I go?"

"Yes."

"Sir, I thank you heartily, and all the more so because I was this night trying to do a good deed."

Essex bowed in skeptical silence.

"May I ask a favor of you?" she added.

"You may ask it."

"It is that you will not tell Rodman Stacey of what has occurred. I am his house-keeper, but I don't like to have him know I have meddled with his private affairs."

"I can make no promise. If you had been frank with me it might have been different, but you would say nothing of what I asked you about, so we must proceed on that basis. I intend to do my utmost to learn what I have inquired about in vain—unless you now speak."

It was the last effort, and it failed. Daisy was not the woman to weaken when she was thoroughly herself, and she was calm and firm, at last. She made a reply about in keeping with her recent answers, and Essex had no more to say.

With ironical politeness he told her they would dispense with her company, and then escorted her to the street. He made no move to see her to a car, and she went alone.

Chimmie Dunn had accompanied Bronson, and he had something to say as he noticed that the latter was going to leave.

"Say, boss, when kin I see you again?"

"What do you wish to see me about?"

"I want a share in this game, b'jinks!" declared Chimmie.

"In what way?"

"I'm interested, I be. This is richer than sellin' suspenders, an' I want ter keep in the swim. Ef you play the detective, why not let me inter the game? Mebbe you won't find me a slim-Jim, after all."

"Your proposition may yet be taken up with, my boy. You are possessed of the shrewdness born of your street-life, and that means a good deal. Just now I can say nothing, and it is too late to lay plans. Let us adjourn, and I will see you again."

This promise satisfied Chimmie, and they separated, but even when Essex was alone in his room he did not go to bed. He had more than ever of which to think.

"What is the interest which Daisy feels in Paulus Andrews, dead, which she did not feel when he was living? Why did she try to steal his body? Mystery, all is mystery. This must be seen to, but I don't catch the light yet. I must find light, though, and solve the whole riddle. That is my sacred duty, and it shall be done."

Bronson's thoughts turned to another matter.

"Why did Daisy show such emotion at sight of Lil the Lamplighter? Even as the woman was severely shaken up when she first saw Paulus's face in the undertaker's shop, so was she moved when she saw Lil. Yes, and she was not the only one thus affected. Old Harry Hawk started and stared curiously when he saw Lil on the roof, and sight of Paulus in his coffin broke the detective all to pieces, as I may say, and turned him from a blind tool of Wageline to my own ally. Curious! What is Lil that she should thus move two adults? Lil is a child, innocent in certain ways if not in all, and she cannot have been in any scheme or drama of the past. Why then should she so frighten both Daisy and Old Harry?"

It was a question Bronson could not answer.

He went to bed with no more light.

He rose late, the next morning, and found there was a visitor waiting for him. The man, admitted, proved to be Old Harry Hawk, in a marked disguise.

"Ho! ho!" he exclaimed, shaking Bronson's hand, "you sleep late. This won't do for a detective."

"I was up late."

"Rioting around?"

"No," replied Essex. "I was on our case."

"Ho! What is new?"

Bronson told all, and Old Harry listened with close attention. As he made no comment, Essex asked:

"What do you think of it?"

"Mystery, by thunder!"

"Daisy has some deep interest in Paulus Andrews."

"Should say she had, but what it is I don't know. We will learn. Partner, I have news, too."

"What?"

"I've been busy. I promised you to look into affairs concerning Babe Brazer's ranch, and seek for those who were there the night of the killing, besides the killers. I've found one."

"A sailor?"

"No. It is Ira Briggs, who is man-of-all-work for Babe. Ira has not got the softest snap there, for he labors hard and has small pay, and when I put out hard cash he talked. Ho! ho!"

"To what extent?"

"The regular boarders at Babe's place, that night, were two sailors who had recently come in on a ship of of some sort. All that Ira could tell of the night he got from them, for Ira was not at home that eventful night, you see."

"Well?"

"Ira went back to Babe's in the morning at an early hour, and thus encountered the sailors, who had risen and come forth for breakfast. They did not see Babe while Ira was with them, if they did at all, but one of them opened on Ira with the question: 'What sort of a house is this, anyhow?'"

"What was meant by that?" inquired Essex.

"That's what Ira asked them, but he did not find out, in full. The previous questioner started to reply, and began in these words: 'You ought to know better than I, but it's the kind of a house I won't sleep another night in. I object—' What he objected to I can't tell you, for Ira could not tell me. Sailor Number Two shut off Number One with the quick order: 'Drop it!'"

"And no more was said?" added Essex.

"It, whatever that meant, was 'dropped.' The prudence of the second sailor prevailed, and Ira was told nothing further, but he saw that the two Jack Tars were disturbed over something, and had a feeling of some sort against the house."

"Where are they now?"

"True, where? They went out as soon as they had their breakfast eaten, and they came back no more. Ira has never seen or heard of them since, and so ends the story."

"Can't we trace them?"

"We must try."

"What were their names?"

"Eben and Sam."

"What else?"

"Ira could tell no more. They called each other by the names I have given, but their surnames were and are unknown to him. Thus, we have no great clew, but it is something."

"Do you infer that they saw a part of the murder?"

"They saw, or heard, something."

"We must have them by some means."

"Another thing. You told me that, when Daisy was in the saloon with Babe Brazer, she asked him to look for a pin she had found."

"Yes."

Old Harry took out a folded paper which he carefully undid until its contents was revealed. Then Bronson saw a bosom-pin, all gold with the exception of a small diamond which glistened brightly. Old Harry surveyed his ally calmly.

"What is this?" asked Essex.

"True, what is it? What, if not the pin?"

"Where did you get it?"

"Of Ira Briggs, and he found it near Babe's place. More, he found it on the roof half-way between Babe's and where Paulus Andrews's body lay that morning."

"Ha! this is a great step!" cried Bronson.

"Unless signs go all wrong," replied Old Harry, coolly, "we have something like proof against the suspected parties. We are moving on, and all we need is further proof. That proof shall be had!"

CHAPTER XVIII.

UNSEEN FOES.

THE detective spoke with the firmness of a resolute nature, and that was all he had to depend upon for the time being. Tony Wageline was still keeping up the farce of hunting for Paulus Andrews's slayer, and this would enable Old Harry to work without so much danger of detection, but he must work against Wageline, as well as the real murderers of the inventor, and all the while his course must be disguised.

Old Harry felt capable of doing this, but he could not explain a plan not yet formed.

When he left Bronson the latter was not enlightened to any great extent, but he intended to do his part in the struggle.

It was the middle of the afternoon when a letter was brought to the young man. He opened the envelope and read as follows:

"MR. BRONSON:—I want you to come here this evening and see me about Paulus Andrews. You were his friend, and so was I. Don't fail in this, if you want to do good. I am an honest woman. Come at 8 P. M.
"HANNAH CARTER."

Then came an address, but, beyond this, Essex was left in the dark.

"Who is Hannah Carter?" he wondered.

"I never heard of her, and she tells nothing that I wish to know. Is it a square deal? Rodman Stacey knows me as his foe. Can this be a trap he is trying to lure me into?"

The possibility made Essex hesitate for some time, but he decided to test the matter practically. He would go armed, and if harm was offered him, it might not be so easy with the enemy.

At the proper hour he left the house. He was still impressed with the notion that a plot lay behind the note, and this led him to try and see Old Harry Hawk on the way, but Old Harry was not to be found, and Bronson had to go without having made his journey known to anybody.

The journey took him into a part of the city which was poor and humble, and he saw some signs that it was vicious, but he did not let that trouble him.

He might have been more troubled if he had seen that he was followed wherever he went, and that, when he was once in the house, those who had dogged him took position outside the door and watched as if to see him when he came out. Rough and evil looking men they were, and when it is said that they were none other than Babe Brazer and Tim O'Killen, it will be seen that their looks did not belie their real nature.

Unaware of this espionage, Essex had made due inquiries and been conducted to the presence of a woman who had a very coarse face, but no sign of viciousness. She was in a room humble in the extreme, and had evidently been busy with the washing of clothes, but she ceased, brushed the dust from a chair and spoke in a high-pitched, harsh voice and rapid manner.

"Set down, sir, set down. Poor is a cheer I kin give you, but that's not my fault. I've been too honest to get rich. An honest woman I am, sir—honest and hard-working—and ef you want shirts or collars done up, it's myself can do it as well as any Chineese you kin find in the city. It is that!"

"Well, madam," replied Essex, "I did not come about washing—"

"I know it."

"I received the note you wrote me—"

"Wasn't that proper?"

"Certainly. There can have been no impropriety about it!"

"I had a neighbor write it, for I ain't no scholar, but I told her it would be perfectly fit and proper I should address you, an' I am

an honest woman, sir, an' that poor that you could buy my worldly effects for the price of a wash."

Essex began to think he had merely met a beggar who wanted to harass him with her woes, and he came to the point abruptly.

"You wrote that you wanted to see me concerning Paulus Andrews—"

"I am coming ter that, but you keep interruptin' of me."

"Pardon me," returned Bronson, trying to be patient.

"I see by the papers that you knew Mr. Andrews."

"So I did."

"So did I."

"When?"

"Not lately, but some years ago."

"What do you know of him?"

"Not much, but more than the papers have told. I used to do washing for his son's family."

"His son? I did not know he had a son."

"The son died years ago, an' so did the son's wife."

"Oh! I had hoped you would be able to tell me of some one who knew Paulus Andrews—"

"I am trying to do so, but you keep interruptin' of me."

"Again, pardon me," patiently replied Bronson. "Go on!"

"Well, the son's wife had a sister, an' I guess you can find her. Her name was Eunice Perkins."

"Do you know where she is?"

"No, but this much I do know. She married a man named Stacey, and is in New York."

"A man named Stacey?" cried Essex.

"What was his first name?"

"They called him Rod."

"Ah!"

Bronson paused to take in all this revelation, but Hannah did not give him time to think much. She went on in her voluble way.

"If I had thought Eunice a nice woman I should have been sorry to see her marry Stacey, for I have understood he wanted to keep the marriage secret, but she was as much of a schemer as he was, an' it was a toss-up to say which was gettin' the worst of it."

"Describe this Eunice, please."

"Well, she was sorter tall, an' rather fine figured, an' she wa'n't bad lookin' o' face, some might think. She was dressy, an' had nice black hair that set her looks off. Then she had a good bit of color in her cheeks, like I had before I took in washin' so much—but I am an honest woman, an' loss o' color ain't no disgrace."

"Of course not, madam."

"I thought you would like ter know about Eunice."

"You are positive she was a sister to the wife of Paulus Andrews's son, you say?"

"Yes."

Essex felt that he had moved on a step. Hannah had given him a good description of Daisy Edwards, and if she was, indeed, Eunice Perkins, it was not strange she had felt some emotion when she knew to what Paulus Andrews had come, or that she wished to bury his body decently. But the new discoveries did not lessen the probability that Andrews had been killed by Stacey, with Daisy as an accomplice.

While Essex was thus thinking there was an interesting by-play at the window. Humble as Hannah's quarters were, the room was on the ground floor. Thus, it was not odd, in one sense, that a human face suddenly appeared at the window.

It was more noteworthy that it was the face of Babe Brazer.

That person looked for a moment, and then his head sunk down and there was nothing inside to tell the work of a spy. Suspicious circumstance! Why did Babe and his right hand man thus dog Bronson?

Evil of nature and furtive of manner, there was good reason, this night, to suspect that the pair intended to commit another crime. Essex would do well to look to his life.

Unsuspecting of danger, the now thoroughly interested visitor resumed his questions:

"You say that you knew positively that Paulus Andrews had a son, and that the son was married?"

"So I was told. Both the son an' his wife are dead now, though, an' so is their child; a boy which lived to be two years old."

"How well did you know them?"

"Not well, of course. You see, I was doin' the washin' fer Miss Eunice, and she recommended me ter her sister, so I got that wash, too. I did it until they died, but I didn't go to the house. I had a woman then who used to go fer what clothes I washed, an' carry them back when they was done. I never went ter the son's house, an' never see him nor his wife, nor knew any more of them than that they had their wash done by me."

"But you saw Eunice Perkins?"

"Yes, fer she used to get mad every little while because the skirts I washed for her—askin' your pardon fer mentioning them—had a wrinkle or two in them, an' then she would fly over here an' blow me up, Eunice would."

"And Paulus Andrews—what did you know of him?"

"That was funny. One evenin' jest before Christmas a little old man came here an' said he wanted to pay a bill fer somebody else. 'You wash fer Eunice Perkins's sister-in-law, don't you?' says he. Of course I told him I did. 'Well,' says he, 'I am Paulus Andrews, an' the sister-in-law's husband is my son. I want to make them a Christmas present, and I'll do it this way. I'll pay their wash-bill.' Well, sir, I had heard of odd gifts, but that was the oddest, I thought; an' I've remembered it to this day."

"You are sure it was Paulus Andrews, are you?"

"He said so, an' he ought to know."

"Then we may assume that Paulus had a married son. Are you sure the son and his wife died?"

"Yes. I watched the funerals from the corner o' their block."

"And this woman who married Stacey was sister to Mrs. Andrews, junior?"

"Yes. Now, let me say one thing about Eunice. She was an adventuress, an' I know it. I don't know jest in what line, but she got her livin' by her wits, an' I s'pose it was a big raise when she married Stacey."

"All is told now, is it?"

"Yes, but you find Stacey an' you'll find her, unless she has been throwed over by him. I thought this would help if you was as much at sea as the newspapers say you be."

The investigators were not so "much at sea," but he did not see fit to make the fact known to Hannah. There was no occasion for his taking her into his confidence, but he did feel pleased because he had, it seemed, gained clue to part of the mystery. Matters began to grow lighter, he thought.

Just then, unknown to him, the window was again obscured momentarily as a human head was raised so that a pair of eyes could scan the scene. Babe Brazer was still at his post.

The head dropped out of sight, but it was an ominous thing that the man lingered there. Why was he spying upon Essex? What evil design had he in mind?

Bronson rose.

"I suppose, Mrs. Carter, that if you are wanted again in this case, and we will pay you well for lost time, you will aid us?"

"Bless you, sir, I will do anything—if I don't lose cash by it, but I have to wash, sir; wash for a livin'."

Essex only paused to assure her that she should be well paid, and then he left the house.

Babe Brazer and Tim O'Killen left their covert.

CHAPTER XIX.

A SPY, AND HIS LUCK.

"Now fer my entrance to a new field o' labor, an' ef I don't do as well at it as I have et sellin' suspenders, I'm a liar. Why, I'll jest make Tony Wageline an' Old Harry Hawk turn pale with envy!"

The time was the same evening when Bronson called on Hannah Carter; the place was the roof of the house kept by Babe Brazer, the speaker was Chimmie Dunn.

The vender of suspenders was of an ad-

venturesome turn of mind, and this had led him to consider a rash project. This was nothing more than to enter the Brazer house secretly, and see if he could gain any light on the Andrews mystery.

Detective work has a fascination for all, and especially for the young. Chimmie was not aware of the amount of danger a detective has to dare in his calling, and the little danger he had expected from his own undertaking he was fully prepared to risk.

He had used John Maines's house as a means of getting out on the roof-area, and from there it was easy to go along to Babe Brazer's. When he found that the scuttle was not fastened he knew there was nothing to prevent his entrance, and his dream of detective glory grew apace.

"Here goes!"

He stepped carefully down on the ladder, and was fully inside the building.

Once there the task began to look more difficult. He was in utter darkness, and he did not have any more knowledge of the interior than arose from acquaintance with the general plan of like houses. He must move along in this darkness, and there was no knowing what might happen. It was nearly ten o'clock, and the house gave no sounds which told that anybody was astir, but, he felt sure that burly Babe and his own gang were not the men to retire at an early hour.

He expected to find some one awake, and this was just what he wanted. He wished to spy on them.

After feeling around for some time he found a door which took him out into the upper hall, and then he moved down to the next floor. Below him he could see a light, but there was no sound. For a boarding-house Babe Brazer did not seem to be doing a very brisk business, just then, but it might be the recent notoriety of his house had led him to reject custom until the storm blew over.

Chimmie had left the scuttle open, and this created a draft. As he stood there in quiet attention the wind came down from the attic, and with it drifted a paper which fell at the boy's feet.

He picked it up with a little of curiosity.

"Wot's all this?" he muttered, looking at divers eccentric characters on it in writing. "Seems like a Chinese wash-bill with variations, but I reckon it is—Hullo!"

His roving gaze had suddenly detected a part of the writing which was not so obscure. Two words were plain enough.

"Paulus Andrews!" he muttered, quickly.

"Well, now, considerin' that Tony Wageline has brought these fellers in Not Guilty, this looks peculiar. What's a paper with Paulus's name on it doin' in this house? Rather guess I'll keep this jigger, an' then see wot I kin find. Poke on, Chimmie, fer the hours is flectin'."

He thrust the paper into his pocket, and then crept on down the stairs. He was on the threshold of discoveries, for voices came to his hearing, and he became wary.

He began to realize that he was not engaged in the most agreeable work. He had entered the house because he thought that Babe Brazer's known and suspected crimes made radical action excusable, but it began to dawn upon him that his work was not authorized by law, and that he was liable to get into trouble in various ways.

Discovering that the voices came from a room near at hand, and that nobody was to be seen outside of it, he went close to the door.

"Men in there!" he muttered. "Shall I risk an openin' up?"

He meditated, and then unclosed the door a little.

No creaking sound betrayed him, and then, safe for the time, he stood still and drank in the conversation within.

"I don't see but we are still in the game," said one person.

"We be, sure," replied another.

"He will find the safest way ain't ter buck up against our crowd."

"Right you be, old man."

"We are in a corner where we must fight or go under, fer we can't run. We don't want ter run, either."

"He has found et out."

"Yes, he won't trouble us no more. By this night's work we have disposed o' him."

ter stay, an' that is the last of it. He's fixed. Now what about the newspaper gal?"

"She must be wound up, too."

"I don't know but she is quite as dangerous as he was, fer them newspaper chumps are red-hot when they get a-goin', an' et takes the best o' strategy an' luck ter beat them out."

"Let the gal try ter worry us an' she will get hurted, by gar! I won't have her nosin' around when nobody else suspects us. See?"

Chimmie Dunn pushed the door a little more open, and thus gained view of the speakers. As he had expected, they proved to be Babe Brazer and Tim O'Killen. With pipes and whisky before them they were enjoying the evening.

"Cricketty! but ain't I enter them?" thought the spy. "This is prime detective work, an' ef they will only let out a few more links, I'll hev the whole case down fine. Afraid o' the female reporter, be they? Wal, they will find the Dunn family inter the game, too."

"Is there any danger o' their puttin' another detective enter the job?" inquired Tim.

"No, Tony holds the reins."

"Suppose they tire of his lack o' success?"

"Let them try ter depose Tony an' they will find he has a pull."

"All seems lovely, then."

"Yes, unless the gal gets at us. Before ter-night there was two we had ter fear, but one is out o' the way. Only she remains, an' ef she values her hide she will keep away from us. It might be dangerous ter do otherwise. See?"

"Bet yer life!"

Chimmie grew disgusted. Although there was much that was suggestive in their words they did not speak as much to the point as he could wish.

"Nothin' but a mutual admiration sassiety, so fer," he thought, sourly. "Ef they killed Paulus, why don't they say so, right out?"

Unfortunately for Chimmie he was not in charge of their minds and tongues then, and not only did they fail to come to the point as he wished, but, unknown to him, other events were shaping themselves in a way not agreeable to the self-constituted detective.

Alert as Chimmie was in one way he was deaf to everything in another. He did not hear footsteps ascend the lower flight of stairs; he did not hear the feet fall on the floor just behind him; he heard nothing until a hand fell on his collar and a voice exclaimed:

"Dash it! I've got ye!"

Chimmie bounced to his feet. What he saw was alarming, for he was in the grasp of a burly six-footer, and all his high hopes went to pieces. He had been caught acting the spy, and he did not doubt that his captor was one of Babe's heelers.

With the strength of desperation he tried to break the hold upon him, but he failed signally.

"Hi!" cried the captor; "come this way an' see w'ot I've got!"

Babe Brazer lived a life of alertness, and the cry was enough to rouse him to action. He rushed out of the room, and then stopped short at sight of the two persons there in the hall.

"See!" added the captor.

"See w'ot?" demanded Babe. "Who in thunder is this kid?"

"I don't know, but I found him listenin' at the door."

"Listenin' ter us?"

"Yes."

"By gar!"

Babe appeared to be utterly amazed that such a thing should be, but this mood quickly disappeared. He remembered that conversation had been on a delicate subject, and all of his fury rose. He seized upon Chimmie and shook him roughly.

"Say, you little hound!" he cried, "I'm goin' ter strangle ye."

Chimmie was in for it, and his coolness began to return.

"Say, you!" he replied, "w'ot's all this fuss about? All you can do is to kick me out."

"It is, is it?"

"Sure, Mike!"

"That may be your idea, but it ain't mine."

"Come, don't be rusty. Give a feller a place ter sleep, an' I'll work fer you all the mornin'."

"So you want a place to sleep?"

"That's w'ot I come in fer."

"That's a lie!" declared the unknown man. "I found him listenin' at your door, Mr. Brazer."

"Of course et's a lie," agreed Babe. "Come, you kid, you can't play me that way. Want ter make out you just come in to get a place to sleep, do you? Wal, it won't go down; not with me, by gar! You're a spy, an' I know how to deal with such. Who sent you here?"

He took a tighter turn on Chimmie's collar, and the latter began to lose all love for so-called detective work, but he did not lose his courage outwardly.

"Nobody sent me," he replied.

"That's another lie."

"Ef you know more about my affairs than I do, why don't you tell the story, yerself?" retorted Chimmie.

"This kid is no tramp," added Tim. "I have seen him about the city peddlin' suspenders, I think, an' he's industrious enough ter make a livin'. You kin depend on't he's a spy."

"He is, that," agreed Babe, "an' I'll show him how we deal with such cattle!"

The keeper of the house had been working himself up to a pitch of fury, and he kept it under no longer. With cruel force he compressed Chimmie's neck between his big hands and exclaimed:

"No spy can go monkeyin' around my ranch, by gar! Say your prayers, youngster, fer you're off fer the other world. I have only one reward fer spies, an' you'll get it. Dead men tell no tales!"

CHAPTER XX.

STRUCK DOWN IN THE STREET.

BABE BRAZER was not indulging in idle talk. When he made the sanguinary threats against Chimmie Dunn he meant all he said, and that was that he would put an end to the boy's career, there and then.

He closed his hands around Chimmie's throat with that intention, and the other two men stood by in approving silence, but Chimmie managed to twist himself partially out of the hostile grasp.

"Say, let up on that, will ye?" he gasped.

"No, I won't!" declared Babe. "I'll strangle you, you pryin' hound."

"Ho! ho! Go ahead, and I'll hold yer bonnet!"

This remarkable speech broke in on the boy-slayer, and as it did not come from either of Babe's allies it brought consternation to the trio. Babe loosened his hold and wheeled about as if acted upon by machinery. What he saw was Old Harry Hawk by the door, his mouth open in a wide smile. The detective's side-partner seemed to think the scene of unusual humorous significance.

"Having a little sport?" added the newcomer, calmly.

Babe and his friends stood silent. They knew Old Harry as Tony Wageline's aid, but they did not know how Old Harry was to be met on this occasion.

"Dealing with some tramp, I take it?" pursued Old Harry, coolly.

"They were tryin' ter choke me to death!" cried Chimmie.

"Did it hurt?"

"Hurt? Why, it nearly was murder."

"This is a time of year when fat cattle are always killed off."

Babe took heart. The detective's voice was full of happy-go-lucky indifference; he did not seem to care whether Chimmie was strangled or not. Like master, like man, thought Babe, and he felt a fresh grip on life.

"Fact is," he explained, "this kid entered my house an' acted the spy on me, an' I thought I'd give him a lesson. See?"

"You did right. Now, kick him out into the street, for I want to see you on business. Wageline sent me here, and this big fellow came up to summon you down, but he delayed so long that I came after him. Fire the boy out, and—"

"But he was spyin' on us."

"A meddlesome kid, but what harm can

he do? Who would take his word for anything? Why, I'll shake all he knows out of him!"

Old Harry advanced to Chimmie and seized him by the collar. As he did so he gave the boy a wink which was not seen by any one else, and which made Chimmie's drooping spirits rise a good deal; but he immediately proceeded to carry out his threat of shaking him, and with such vigor that his victim's teeth rattled under the ordeal.

"That's the way to serve him!" added Old Harry.

Chimmie was not exactly of that opinion, for he was not in love with such treatment, but he was shrewd enough to make the best of it and trust to the detective's side-partner.

"Don't you worry about the kid," pursued the shaker, lightly. "I know him by sight—a saucy boy, but not worth minding—and I'll run him outside myself, and then give him a few pointers on minding his own business. Leave him to me. Now, to business. Here is a note from Wageline. It don't need an answer, so I'll only pause to take a drink with you. Ho! ho! I'm the one who sets them up. Come along! Life takes a new grip when the juice of the rye gets into a man's stomach. Long live the juice. Ho! ho!"

Old Harry was talking with an object, and the object was to get Babe's mind off of Chimmie.

He succeeded to a charm, and the keeper forgot his fears and consented to smile in a double sense. He led the way to where he dealt out fluids, and Old Harry forced himself to take a little of the stuff set before him—all to accomplish his object.

When it was done he continued to talk glibly, giving nobody else much of a chance, and then when he was ready to go, he had Babe in good humor. Nevertheless, the latter looked doubtfully at Chimmie when the detective again grasped the boy by the collar, as if to take him out.

"I don't know about this kid!" he grumbled. "He may be full o' mischief, boss."

"If he shows it, now or later, I'll cut his ears off!"

The wily detective scowled upon Chimmie, and the latter assumed an air of alarm.

"I won't never tell nothin', an' I ain't got nothin' ter tell," he whimpered, dolefully.

"Will you keep dead mum?"

"Ye-yes."

"If you don't, off come your ears."

"I won't never say a word."

"And you'll let these gents alone?"

"I will, sure."

"Ho! ho!" cried Old Harry, with a wink to Babe, "I reckon it's all right, ain't it?"

"Yes," replied Babe, hesitatingly.

"Then I'll take him out. Come along, you young fool, and be decent about it, or off come those ears, now."

Assuming a ferocious air the detective dragged Chimmie out of the house, and none too gently. They were soon gone from the sight of Babe and his gang, but Old Harry did not pause until they were three blocks away. Then he suddenly halted.

"Why?" he abruptly asked.

"Eh?"

"What was your game?"

Chimmie understood.

"I was trying to play detective," he sheepishly admitted.

"Ho! ho! So that was it? Well, you didn't go about it right; you should have played 'possum, rather than burglar. Let that pass, though; what did you see and hear?"

Chimmie had seen rough usage since he listened to Babe and Tim, and his wits were not quite as quick as usual. About all he could remember was that there had been talk about the female reporter, and that the conspirators had spoken as though they had no reason to fear Tony Wageline. There had been more talk, but it was obscure at the time, and the boy could not then recall it.

"Take the night to dwell on it," advised Old Harry. "More may get into your head. Of course you know I have saved your life, to-night?"

"You've come near et, boss."

"What will you do in return?"

"Help you all I can," declared Chimmie, quickly.

"Good! I am liable to call upon you again. Just now—Hullo!"

There was a cry of distress not far away.

"Somebody is bein' done up!" exclaimed Chimmie.

"Help! help!" came the cry.

"This way!" commanded the detective.

He ran around the corner, with the boy at his side. When the corner was turned they did not at first see anything or any one, but Chimmie's keen eyes were not long at fault.

"Look on the ground!" he directed.

"Ho! It's a man!"

"Yes. The others hev done him up an' got off. Shall we chase 'em, boss?"

"No, for we have no idea which direction they went. Our proper way is to pay attention to the man we have, just now. He is unconscious."

"Yes, an' I reckon he's got a nasty lick."

They had bent over the man, but he lay perfectly still. Then Chimmie made a discovery.

"Say, he's a sailor."

"He surely has on sailor's clothes."

"Yes. Et's the old story; he's from some ship, an' has been cruisin' around here; an' some thug fell afoul o' him an' done him up. Ef I was a sailor I would either stick ter my ship or get the wax out o' my eyes an' ears."

Old Harry had lifted the unconscious man. There was no visible wound, and this led to the hope that he might not be severely injured. Old Harry decided that he had been hit by a slung-shot or a sand-bag. If it was the latter he was not likely to suffer long from it, but he well knew that a slung-shot often fractures the skull when used.

They were near a house where lived a man known to the detective, and known, too, to be honest; so Old Harry decided to take their sailor in there for a time.

It was done, and then Chimmie went for a doctor, while the detective, with the help of his friend, put the still-unconscious man to bed. He began to recover shortly, and when the doctor came there was activity but not intelligence in his manner.

The doctor shook his head.

"The skull is injured," he announced. "I can't say how seriously, but the man's brain is not right. See! he is awake fully, but the light of intelligence is lacking. My man, how is it with you?"

The sailor looked blank.

"Hold the wheel steady!" he muttered.

"What is your name?" pursued the doctor.

"How is the wind?"

"Who is your captain?"

"South, by sou'east. Keep off the coast well!" muttered the patient, dully, looking at the doctor, but still unintelligently.

"You see how it is," added the man of medicine. "He is in for a siege of more or less duration. Just now I can't tell positively how badly he is injured, but I may be able to, to-morrow."

The speaker had another call to make, and, after giving due directions, he took his departure.

"Well, we are in for it!" commented Old Harry. "I suppose I shall have to be responsible for the bill until I can get rid of the man. We may be able to learn his ship, if he has one, without much trouble."

Chimmie turned to the discarded clothes of the sailor and ran his hand into a pocket. He brought out an envelope, fully inscribed.

"Hullo!" he murmured, "what's this?"

"Sam. D. Lock, care of Babe Brazier, Esq., No. — South street—"

Old Harry snatched the envelope away. Babe's man-of-all-work had told him that the two sailors at the house the night of the murder had called each other "Sam" and "Eben." Was this a clue?

CHAPTER XXI.

THE LIGHTER OF THE LAMPS.

OLD HARRY surveyed the envelope sharply, but Chimmie had told all there was to be seen. The envelope was empty, and the inscription had been given in full.

"You seem interested," remarked the boy. "Any partic'lar reason?"

"I was wondering when this was sent," replied the detective.

"There's the post-mark."

"Ah! I had forgotten that. Ho! ho! it's only a few days ago."

Old Harry made a quick calculation, and found it was dated but two days before the night when Paulus Andrews met his fate.

"Man," he exclaimed, addressing the sailor, "is your name Sam Lock?"

The wounded sailor muttered erratically, and the detective did not lose much time in trying to extract information. He was encouraged, however, for he was inclined to believe he had found one of the sailors who had been at Babe's boarding-house.

They had left abruptly, but before they went they had talked to Ira Briggs, the man-of-all-work, as if they had heard something unusual the eventful night. Perhaps the identity of this man could have been settled, but Babe had discharged Ira, and Old Harry did not know where he was.

"Let me in, will ye?"

This request from Chimmie aroused Old Harry.

"Into what?"

"The secret."

"There is none."

"Come off yer perch!" retorted Chimmie.

"I'm no slouch, an' I know that envelope has meanin' fer you. W'ot is it, boss?"

"Nothing."

"All right, ef you say so, but you can't fool me. I wasn't born with my eyes glued tergether, an' don't ye think et. Hope the envelope will do ye good, jest the same. I reckon the thugs stole his 'leather,' an' thought they had the whole outfit, but they left the thing you wanted most. Speakin' of official dockymunts, sling yer eyes over this."

The boy had remembered the slip of paper which was blown down the stairs from Babe Brazier's attic, and he passed it over to Old Harry.

"This is in some Greek or Choctaw language," he added, "an' I can't git onter et fully."

"What's this?" replied the detective.

"Made out to Paulus Andrews?"

"Sure, Mike!"

"It is in Spanish, and is a receipt of some sort. It appears to be a receipted hotel bill, in fact."

"Now you're vocalizin'!"

"Yes, that is it. I can't read it all, but I should say it was made out when Andrews paid up at the City of Mexico and was about to come home, considering the date. Where did you get it?"

"In Babe's ranch."

"What?"

"Fact!"

"Explain!"

Chimmie told of his adventure, and how the paper had floated down from the attic. It told a good deal more to the listener.

"Here is positive proof that Andrews was in Brazier's house," he thought. "It has always been my theory that he was killed there, and then carried out by way of the house-top and placed where the body was eventually found. He must have had this receipt in his pocket, and it dropped out as they carried his body up, lay unseen until to-night, and was then whirled down by the wind. The hand of fate is in this."

Chimmie watched curiously until he could endure the silence no longer, and then he broke in:

"Does that meet with your approval?"

Old Harry quietly pocketed the paper.

"It may lead to something, and if it does I will not fail to remember you, my lad."

"Remember me now!"

"I will give you money, but in small quantity—"

"Hold up, boss! Et ain't bullion I want, but I want ter come inter the game. Ain't I some good at detective biz? Didn't I find this jigger fer you?"

"What could you do?"

"Work! Spy on the Brazier gang! Act as your agent! Most of all, hold my tongue!"

"Boy, I really believe you are a trump, and I will call on you if I can use you. Let that be enough for now, but I will not forget you. Now, let us go home."

They left the house, and parted at the door. Each went his way, and Old Harry fell into thought deep and earnest. He was not, however, to go to his bed without another experience. The night must have been one espe-

cially inclined to disturbances, for, suddenly, another cry for help broke upon his ears.

This time he did not need to go to see what it meant, for, as he looked, a small girl came rapidly around the corner with a man in pursuit. She saw the detective and hastened toward him, while the unknown enemy, on seeing Old Harry, as promptly took to his heels and skurried away.

All this the girl quickly discovered, and she proved that her courage was good by breaking into a laugh.

"Cricky! he's got scared off, ain't he? Great old chap, he is! He was as brave as a lion when there was nobody but me, but he weakened right spry when he got his glims on you."

"What was it all about?"

"He tried to ketch me, but I run, an' then he come after me like a dog after a cat."

"Why are you so late, Lil?"

"Eh?" cried the child. "Do you know me?"

"You are Lil the Lamplighter."

"So I be, but you— Say, I know you now. You are the other detective I see on the house."

"Yes, but why are you risking your life out here? The streets of New York in this section are not safe at night. You have your future to care for, my little one."

Old Harry Hawk would not have been recognizable to those who knew him only as a scoffing adjunct of Tony Wageline's detective bureau. His voice had a pathetic and tender sound, and his hard face had softened wonderfully. He regarded Lil with solicitude one would not have thought him capable of.

"Do you see this?"

As Lil spoke she brought forward her arm with something grasped in the slender hand. Old Harry looked at the object and nodded.

"I see it, and I recognize it as the concern with which you light the street lamps."

"That's right; that's what it's for, and I know how to use it, too. Ask anybody around here an' they will tell you that Lil the Lamplighter does her work as well as anybody who lights lamps in New York," was the proud declaration.

"But why should you be lighting them so long after dark?"

"When the wind blows, as it does to-night, the lamps sometimes go out. That ain't the fault o' the lighter, but you must remember that John Maines is the one who has the job around here. Ef the lamps work all right nobody would have a word to say, but let them go out and folks would grumble an' say, 'A girl does this work, an' of course she can't do it right.' So Father Maines would lose his job. Ain't that mean?"

"Yes."

"So it is. Well, when I wake up in the night, I jest get up to see ef the lamps is goin'. Ef they ain't, out I come an' fix them. It was that which brought me out to-night."

"You ought not to have come."

"John Maines is sick, an' somebody must do it. Yes, an' John Maines an' us others must have the cash for doin' it. We need it."

"You call him John Maines. Isn't he your father?"

"Well, sorter."

"What do you mean by that?"

"He's a father I adopted, or he adopted me, which is the same thing, ye know," replied Lil.

"Are your parents dead?"

"I give it up," frankly answered Lil. "I don't care to say much about them. You see, they wasn't any good. They were abusin' of me the worst way, an' I was took away from them. Peter Lawson—he was my father—was a drunkard, an' his wife was about as bad. They may be livin', but I don't know an' don't care. I've adopted John Maines, an' he is good enough fer me."

"So your real father's name was Peter Lawson?"

"Yes."

Old Harry looked disappointed.

"Do you remember him well?"

"Don't I?" cried Lil. "Well, I should say I do. He has licked me times enough. He was a bad one, he was; an' I was glad to get away from him. It never occurred to

him that I had human feelin', but I did. Still, I ain't any soft specimen, an' I ain't whimperin', now. I am a business woman; I be!"

She held out the implement of her trade proudly, and the detective found her more than ever an object of interest. She was an unique feature of city life, and full of possibilities. Old Harry, however, was not disposed to say much more. The disappointed look was still on his face, and he conducted her to the door of her humble home almost in silence. There he left her.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE WOMAN BEHIND THE DOOR.

It sometimes happens that when apartments in a building devoted to "flats" become vacant they are filled again only with difficulty and after considerable delay. A certain person who was agent for certain flats in New York was one morning surprised to receive warning from a tenant he had supposed to be a fixture. He was severe in exacting rent for a full month, and this the departing tenant paid without remonstrance. Then the agent played in luck, he thought, in having application from a stranger immediately after.

He received the applicant, and she was prompt in establishing herself. She went into the vacant rooms, and the agent was happy.

She was a woman who seemed to be at least fifty years old, for her hair was gray and her face deeply lined. She was quiet of manner, and bade fair to make a good tenant, it seemed.

The rooms next to her were occupied by Mr. Rodman Stacey.

Perhaps the gray-haired woman was anxious to assure herself that her fellow-tenants were desirable neighbors. Be that as it may, she had no sooner become installed than she developed a disposition to know more of them.

This she did by listening at the connecting door, endeavoring to learn what was said in Mr. Stacey's rooms. Flats are of all sorts and modes of construction, and in this particular case the construction favored her ends.

If the door gave liberty to sounds it gave none to sight, and to those on the other side there was nothing to tell of the gray-haired woman who was so much interested.

Rodman Stacey had been out for some hours, on the day after the scenes of the last chapter. When he came in he found Daisy waiting for him in the main room of the flat. If he had but known it, the gray-haired woman had not failed to be mindful of his return, too, and she at once took position by the connecting door.

"Is there anything new?" asked Daisy.

"No," Stacey replied.

"I have been watching the street all the while you were gone."

"Why?"

"To see if a spy was there."

"Nonsense!"

"It is not nonsense," replied Daisy, quickly. "We must guard against such things."

"If anybody has designs on us the fact will not lead him to set a spy in the street, opposite our quarters, where he could be seen at any time we looked out. It would be rank suicide."

"You may be right," agreed Daisy, thoughtfully.

"I hope you are not getting nervous over this matter."

"Rodman, I am far from satisfied."

"Who is satisfied?" asked Stacey. "It is not the lot of mankind."

"Rodman, I want to have a serious talk with you. I am known here as your housekeeper. What am I, really?"

"Not a household drudge, certainly."

"Am I your wife?"

"Yes."

"Do you tell your friends so?"

"No. You know our marriage was kept secret."

"So it was," admitted Daisy. "Why? I objected, but you said you would soon be where you could freely announce it. Time passed. Then I learned of Paulus Andrews, and the fact that he was in need of some man of money to help him put a good invention on the market. Is it not a fact that you

would never have known of Paulus but for me?"

"It is true."

"I was primarily and wholly the means of bringing him and you together, was I not?"

"Yes."

The gray-haired woman in the next room smiled slightly as she eagerly listened.

"Ah!" she remarked; "and it is only a few days since Mr. Stacey told me—I mean, told the female reporter—that he had heard of Andrews through a patent agent. The stories do not agree."

Daisy went on quickly.

"Do you remember what my reward was to be?"

"No," returned Rodman.

"You said that if you made money out of Andrews, you would make public acknowledgment of our marriage."

"I did?"

"Don't you remember it?"

"I can't say I do, Daisy, but I will take your word for it. Do not get the notion that I wish to avoid doing you justice. You are my legal wife, and I am glad of it. Again I say that you shall speedily have the acknowledgment you desire, but it will not do just now. Until this matter of Paulus Andrews's death is settled, we ought not to make any radical step."

"What difference does that make?"

"Don't we want to fly light?" demanded Stacey, irritably.

The gray-haired woman behind the door whispered to herself:

"Why need you fly light, innocent Rodman?"

The last argument seemed to influence Daisy. She hesitated, sighed, and then replied:

"Possibly you are right."

"I surely am. Let the wind blow past us with as little to check it as possible. Interpose a barrier, and the wind may prove stronger than the barrier. Do you see?"

"Yes, and I think you are right. But do you faithfully promise to acknowledge me when the other matter is settled?"

"I do; I give you my word of honor."

"Then I will wait with patience, though it is far from agreeable. Let it pass, though; I will trust you. I will put the blame on this affair of Paulus Andrews. Why need we be worried about it?"

"Because I was his partner."

"We did not kill him."

"No."

The gray-haired woman knit her brow in a thoughtful frown. Evidently the last words were not to her liking.

"Rodman," pursued Daisy, "how did Andrews die?"

"I don't know," he replied.

"Was he murdered?"

"So the detectives say, and they had a good chance to ascertain. They claim he was slain by a blow which fractured his skull and ended his life. It occurs to me this may have been the result of a fall, but we are not placed so we can guess on the case as well as the police. They say he was murdered, and it seems probable, perhaps."

"But who could have done it?"

"I don't know."

The gray-haired woman moved uneasily.

"Do they seek to deceive even themselves?" she mentally inquired.

"We are suspected," added Daisy.

"You know that is wholly unjust," responded Stacey.

"Yes."

"The whole case is very mysterious."

"And like a horrible nightmare," added the woman, with a shiver. "That night is seared on my brain as if with a hot iron. We decoyed Paulus Andrews; we seemed to have him secure, but we left him alone, apparently dead drunk, for a moment. When we returned to the room he was gone. We found he had escaped by the scuttle; we went out on the roofs and searched for him, but we found him not. He had escaped us fully, and disappeared from view as if the night had swallowed him up. Where did he go? He died that night. How? Did he fall, or was he really murdered? The mystery haunts me!"

The gray-haired woman drew a deep breath. All this was of vital interest to her.

"They claim that they do not know how

Paulus died," she murmured, "and they seem to be sincere. This is most perplexing."

"Set it down that Andrews was murdered," pursued Stacey. "He was found on the top of a big building—he could not have fallen to that place. No, he went there, and there met some one who killed him. Who? Well do you ask the question, for it is mysterious in the extreme. Be the truth what it may, we had no hand in it."

"Right, and we know it was not Babe Brazer or Tim O'Killen, for they were all the while under our eyes. Rodman, it is a matter of profound satisfaction to me that the blood of Paulus Andrews is not on our hands!"

Daisy spoke with much of deep feeling, and the listener behind the door seemed more than ever staggered.

"Incomprehensible!" she breathed.

Stacey regarded his companion wonderingly.

"Whence comes this sudden conscientiousness on your part?" he demanded, curiously.

"Did I ever do murder?" Daisy cried.

"Not to my knowledge."

"Or connive at it—before?"

"No."

"There lies the explanation. I have been weak, wayward, a thief, and the ally of blackmailers and swindlers; but murder I never did or connived at. When you talked of slaying Andrews I weakened; I consented and took part in the decoying. Thank Heaven I was saved from such infamy. Andrews escaped us, and his blood is not on our hands, I say."

The gray-haired woman knitted her brows in a thoughtful frown.

"Then who did kill Paulus Andrews?" she murmured.

CHAPTER XXIII.

ESSEX BRONSON MISSING.

THE woman spy hoped to hear more of interest, but she had gained all the information she was to get. She heard some one rise in the next room, and then Rodman Stacey's voice sounded in reply to his companion.

"I should not worry if we had killed Andrews, but we did not, and that is the end of it. Keep yourself from worrying about this, for it will do no good, and we need not borrow trouble."

"Are you going out?" Daisy asked.

"Yes."

"Where?"

"To have a game of billiards."

"How can you, under present circumstances?"

"My mind," calmly replied Stacey, "is free and easy. If the truth is ever discovered in regard to Paulus Andrews we shall be proved innocent. While there is no proof against anybody, nobody can be arrested. Why should I worry? Free from guilt and worry, I mean to enjoy life. The game of billiards will amuse me."

The gray-haired woman heard him open the door.

"Am I wholly on the wrong track?" she murmured. "Is the gang we had marked as guilty, in the past, really innocent? But this game of billiards may be but a trick. I will follow Mr. Rodman Stacey."

She hastily threw on her out-door garments, and hurried out of the house in time to get sight of Stacey. She began the pursuit, but it proved to be very short. All hope ended when he sauntered easily into a billiard-room, never looking behind him.

"Foiled!" she admitted. "He was sincere for once, at least, and it seems his mind is easy, whether the condition rises from innocence or hardened indifference."

She walked on down the street, wrapped in wonder and uncertainty.

"This talk between him and the woman puzzles me," she admitted. "They asserted that they did not know who killed Paulus Andrews. Was this true, or did they know I was listening? But that is a ridiculous thought; they would not have made the damaging statements they did, if they had been aware of listeners so near."

Perplexed, she arrived at a decision.

"I will go down-town. I must see Old Harry Hawk or Essex Bronson. I need advice; I want to consult somebody."

Believing it would be difficult to see Old Harry, since he had no office of his own, it was toward Bronson's quarters that she started. Before she reached the place, however, she saw somebody whose proximity brought a look of relief to her mind. It was Old Harry, himself.

She hurried on and accosted him.

"Mr. Hawk, can I speak with you?" she asked.

He turned a glum face toward her.

"It won't cost you anything," he snapped.

"Why do you speak— Oh! don't you know me, Mr. Hawk?"

"No, I don't."

"I am Minola Alden."

"The dickens you are! Is that the disguise you have got into? It makes you a new woman."

His face relaxed, and then he dropped his curt manner wholly.

"Excuse me if I was ungracious, but I was worried, and I did not suspect your identity. Have you news?"

"I have moved into and used a flat next to Rodman Stacey's."

"Good! With what result?"

Minola told what she had heard, and told it fully and concisely. Old Harry listened attentively, and when she was done he whistled softly. He remained silent, however.

"What do you make out of it?" she inquired.

"Can they have been on to you?" he replied.

She gave her reasons for believing this was not the case.

"Logical," he agreed. "Had they known you were about they would not have confessed that they decoyed Andrews to Babe Brazer's at all. They did not suspect you were listening. Thunder and lightning! can it be they did not kill Paulus Andrews?"

"Who did?"

"Perplexing! So they had him at Babe's, and he escaped and was seen no more. Ho! ho! this is amazing!"

"Somebody killed him."

"Yes, but that is not it. If it was not their gang, we are wholly on the wrong scent. Odd, by Jupiter! Odd! Why should they lie in secret— Ho!"

The eccentric detective broke off in such a way that Minola knew he had an idea of some sort.

"What is it?" she asked.

"Nothing, nothing!"

"You have a theory—"

Old Harry suddenly caught Minola by the arm.

"Where is Essex Bronson?" he demanded.

"I don't know."

"When did you see him last?"

"Not for several days. It was on Saturday, I think."

"Ho! ho!"

"Why do you ask?" she added.

"The man is missing. He has gone out of sight like a shot. Can't find him anywhere. Left his hotel one evening, and now is seen no more. Odd, by my life! He's not the man to be frivolous, and he was in this case to stay, I do believe. Yet, he has vanished like a last year's chrysanthemum."

Minola looked worried.

"Has he met with foul play?" she inquired.

"Just my notion. Has the gang made way with him?"

"Have you made careful search?"

"The fullest and widest."

Old Harry and Minola regarded each other with blank dismay pictured on each face. They were interested in the fortunes of their ally, and they did not need to exchange opinions to see that it was the common belief that the young man had come to harm. Whether Babe Brazer and his gang had taken part in the killing of Paulus Andrews or not, they had shown that they were dangerous, and Bronson's disappearance startled them.

"Tell me all about it," requested Minola.

The detective obeyed. He had tried to see Essex and failed, and since then he had searched far and near for him. This was the story in brief, but he made it long, and told of his repeated exertions, all of which

made the seriousness of the case stand out fully.

"It would be just like them to do him personal harm," remarked Minola, with a shiver. "It is terrible to think of. What are we to do?"

Old Harry revealed a folded paper.

"I am now investigating," he replied.

"Listen to this!"

And the detective read aloud as follows:

"MR. BRONSON:—I want you to come here this evening and see me about Paulus Andrews. You were his friend, and so was I. Don't fail in this, if you want to do good. I am an honest woman. Come at 8, P. M.

HANNAH CARTER."

"What is that?" inquired Minola.

"A note I found in Bronson's room. It is dated the day he disappeared, and it seems possible it was that which took him away."

"A decoy!" cried Minola.

"Just my idea."

"Is the address given?"

"Yes."

"Then it can be investigated."

"I am on my way there now. Will you wait in a safe place until I have looked into the house and see what it is like?"

"Gladly!"

"Let it be so, then."

A certain restaurant was selected as Minola's waiting-place, and there she took up her quarters. Old Harry was not gone so long as she had expected, but when he returned she studied his face in vain for a clue to the situation.

"Was it a decoy?" she demanded, eagerly.

"It was a genuine note, I do think," the detective answered. "I found Hannah Carter, and she had such an honest face, and her explanation was so clear that I gave up all idea of finding a plotter in her. She wanted to see Bronson, and she invited him there. He came; he went away in safety."

"And then?"

"Kidnapped!"

"What do you mean?"

"By luck I happened on a small boy who told me much of importance. He says his attention was attracted, that evening, by two men who were skulking around Hannah's house, and peering into her windows. When Bronson came out these followed him, and on the corner he was suddenly seized, hustled into a close carriage and whirled away down the street."

"Kidnapped!" echoed Minola, with deep feeling.

"Yes."

"By whom?"

"In telling me of the kidnappers, the boy exactly described Babe Brazer."

"Ah!"

"Set it down as a fact," added Old Harry, "that the young man has fallen into the hands of the infamous keeper of the sailors' boarding-house. He may be dead or alive, now, but it was Babe who nabbed him."

"It is an appalling thing to think of."

"Remember you are a newspaper woman."

"My line is not crime and its branches."

"I should hope not. Well, I agree with you that this is a bad business. Babe and his men have done away with Bronson—how, I don't know, even though I have more information, I think, than that already spoken of. A shrewd young friend of mine named Jimmy Dunn—he sells suspenders for a living—recently played the spy in Babe's house. He heard Babe and Tim speak of some one they had put out of the way, but whether by slaying or imprisoning him, I know not. Yes, it was Babe. Now, where do we come in?"

"We must do something."

"Do you know your share?"

"Believing as we do that Babe is but a tool for Rodman Stacey, I can think of nothing better than to go back to the flat I have hired, and there continue to act the listener on Stacey and Daisy."

"You have it. This shall be your part for the present. You wear an admirable disguise. Could you get up another as good, if necessary?"

"Yes."

"Is your courage good?"

"Yes!"

"You speak with emphasis, and I reckon you don't exaggerate. Well, I may ask you to get into a disguise and help me. Now, you had better go back to the flat?"

"And you—what will you do?"

"Act promptly and decisively. I go to precipitate a crisis."

CHAPTER XXIV.

A STARTLING INTERRUPTION.

OLD HARRY spoke with decision, and Minola caught at the inspiration of his voice no less than the drift of his words.

"You go to precipitate a crisis," she repeated, quickly. "What do you mean?"

"I do not myself know, at present," the detective answered. "It is clear to me, however, that there must be decisive work in the case. We can't bring Paulus Andrews back to life, but, if Bronson is alive, we must find and save him. Possibly, if he is alive, the secret of his place of imprisonment could be learned by dogging Brazer, Tim and Stacey, but that would be taking upon myself more work than I can do alone, and it might take weeks to do it. I must move right on the enemy's line, but how I don't know. Shall we say good-day, now?"

He sent a glance down the street as if eager to be off, and Minola did not delay him. They parted, and she returned to the flat.

Old Harry went off muttering to himself in his eccentric way, and with his wild eyes and wilder hair he might well have been taken for a deranged person, but his brain was shrewdly at work.

For years he had been the careless tool of Tony Wageline's will, but events had aroused the latent manhood within him, at least, and he was moved by feelings new to him. He was proceeding with right and justice as his sole prompters.

His mood of deep thought was not in vain, for his face suddenly lighted, and, after a little more meditation, he arrived at a decision.

"I'll beard Babe Brazer in his den, at once!" he exclaimed.

The resolution was not taken hastily, for he had his plan of action marked out and with the idea thus formulated he moved to the work.

It was not far to Babe's quarters, and when South street had been reached Old Harry delayed not in entering the hair of the wolf. He found Babe on the lower floor, and sampling his own wares of the liquid kind. The burly ruffian had not yet suspected the good faith of Tony Wageline's side-partner, and he was greeted with civility.

"Take somethin'," urged the host.

Old Harry had once tasted the fiery fluid sold by Babe, and he evaded trying it again by means of an excuse more diplomatic than true.

"I've already had all I can carry. Let me off this time. I wanted to speak with you, Mr. Brazer."

Babe leaned over his bar with careless unconcern.

"Drive on!" he requested.

"Have you seen Wageline lately?" pursued Old Harry.

"Not fer four days."

"Has he sent you word?"

"No."

"I ask this because he thought he might get around, himself, or send another agent to see you before I could finish my business and call on you."

"I see."

Babe did not see. Old Harry had simply been pumping him to learn if his own plot seemed safe. Now, he was ready to act.

"Do you remember Wageline's theory as to the slayer of Andrews?" he inquired.

"After I was cleared," answered Babe, blandly, "it was Tony's idea that the killin' was done by a Portuguese sailor who was seen cruisin' around here."

"I know it."

Old Harry did not think it necessary to state that he knew the Portuguese to be a myth; a creature created by Tony when he was, as it was suspected, bought off by the real slayers. He dropped the sailor promptly, and went on to his own fiction.

"Tony has another theory now."

"Wot?"

"You know Essex Bronson?"

"I've heerd o' that critter."

"He came from the Southern lands with Andrews."

"Yes."

"Who knows but he killed him, after robbing him? Andrews must have had money. Where did it go? Who knew so well that he had it as Bronson did? That's what is in Tony's mind."

Babe blinked hard. For reasons of his own he was interested, and he was trying to see how this placed himself.

"Why do ye come ter me?" he finally inquired.

"Bronson has left his boarding-place in the hotel, and Tony wants to find him. His idea is that Bronson may be a hard character, and has taken refuge in this vicinity. He thinks you can find him better than he can, and he's willing to pay you well to do it."

"Tony Wageline is?"

"Yes."

Old Harry watched Babe closely. Had he made a mistake? Was Tony in the plot to capture or slay Bronson?—in brief, had he helped to remove the missing man? If so, the present investigator was making a great mistake. But Babe showed no suspicion.

"You say Tony will pay wal ter find Bronson?"

"Yes."

"Wot will he do when he's found?"

"Look into his case."

"I do not think Bronson ought ter be at large."

"Your idea is sound. He should be shut up," promptly agreed the visitor.

Babe ran his fingers through his obstinate hair until the shock stood up even more stiffly and wildly. He seemed to be much perplexed, and Old Harry thought he could guess why. If he had Bronson shut up he would not favor letting him out on any pretense, while if he had killed the missing man, it was too late to think of other ways.

"Wot will Tony Wageline pay me to find Bronson?" he inquired, after a long pause.

"Possibly, five hundred dollars."

"An' Tony sent you here ter see me?"

"Yes."

"It's a lie!"

The words came in a shout from the door behind Old Harry and as the latter wheeled he saw the man of all men he did not want to see.

Wageline, himself, was there.

Silence fell over the group—silence profound, but full of import as to the future. The chief detective's face was dark with rage, and he seemed to have the will to kill his side partner, then and there. Long had Old Harry been his pliant tool, but the time was past, and he had caught him in the very act of treachery. All this was clear, and Tony was furious.

To Old Harry it was a shock to see what trouble had come. Plainly he saw that there was no way of evading the point at issue; Tony's own ears had been his informants, and he would not give credence to any explanation, be it ever so plausible.

The crash had come, but the detective's aid did not shrink from it, or show the least personal fear. His disappointment was deep, but he faced Wageline coolly.

"You scoundrel!" shouted the chief, when he could command his breath again, "why have you come here with that lie?"

"Well, Wageline," calmly answered Old Harry, "it suited my purpose."

"You said I sent you. You dog! how dared you?"

"Dared? Wageline, I am not afraid of you!"

"Did he tell me all this as a lie?" asked Babe, finding speech, himself. "Did he do it?"

"Nobody sent him."

"By gar! the feller is a traitor, then!" shouted the keeper.

"That's just what he is," declared Tony, "but he has been caught in the act. I don't know what his game is, but he has come to grief."

Babe hastened to the door and closed it.

"Ef he's a traitor," added the ruffian, in a growl, "he don't go out o' here alive!"

"Right!" exclaimed Tony. "We will settle his case at once!"

CHAPTER XXV.

HOT ON THE TRAIL.

OLD HARRY HAWK drew his spare form up with cool resolution. Well did he understand the meaning of these threats, but he did not quail.

"So you will 'settle my case?' he replied. "Allow me to say that you need not trouble yourself; I can transact my own business, and without any help from you."

"The trouble is you try to transact too much that is none of your business!" retorted Wageline. "You have been my aid, and I have found you treacherous. I do not know how much mischief you have done in the meanwhile, and the only way to settle the score is to settle you, too."

"And this is the way!" added Babe Brazer, quickly.

As he spoke he drew a revolver. Wageline hastily reached for the weapon.

"Give it here!" he requested.

Babe obeyed, and then the crook detective turned it upon Old Harry.

"You don't go out of here alive!" he declared, with bitter vehemence.

"Good!" exclaimed Babe. "Plug the cuss!"

It was one man against two, but Old Harry did not move a step. With his old coolness he faced them, and to his face a cynical, peculiar smile gradually came.

"Gentlemen," he remarked, "I advise you to keep your shirts on!"

"What's that?" cried Wageline.

"Don't allow yourself to get hot under the collar; loosen the harness a bit, and let the mare run free. You will rip your spleen up the back, if you keep on this way!"

"You are the one who will get ripped up the back."

"Better not try the carving-knife, Wageline. Remember you are buzzard, not cook. Your breath smells morally."

Old Harry had dropped into his old, sneering manner—a mood far from new to the chief detective, so it did not influence him. Babe Brazer was moved only to disgust with the delay.

"Come!" he cried, "why don't you get a move on?"

Wageline looked the harder at his aid.

"You came here and told a lie about me," he resumed. "What was your object? Why did you say I sent you?"

Old Harry shrugged his shoulders.

"I am silent," he replied, coolly.

"Hawk, you are a traitor!"

"Ho! ho! Who could go back on pretty Tony? Surely, that is impossible!" sneered Old Harry.

"I never had reason to suspect you before, but now there is a case where suspicion is not needed. You are condemned by your own mouth, and the evidence is overwhelming. You have spoken certain words which tell what is in your mind; you are against me in my detective case. Do you think I will endure that?"

"Oh! come off the perch!" exclaimed Babe, impatiently. "You are wastin' a pile o' breath. He's a traitor an' a spy. Don't you know how to deal with sech? I do, by gar! an' I'll do it!"

The ruffian advanced, snatched the revolver, and clicked it suggestively.

"Let me blaze away!" he requested.

"It won't do," hastily responded Tony.

"He's a spy an' a sneak. Be you goin' ter let him go out an' ruin all the plans you have?"

"No."

"How will you prevent it but by doin' of him up?"

"He must be seized and held prisoner."

"Not here!" exclaimed Babe.

"Why not?"

"My house has been advertised too much already."

"Then what shall we do?"

"Shoot the critter!"

Babe was nothing if not direct, but Tony was fully prepared to fall in with his views. The chief detective was just as dishonest as recent events had indicated, but he had no man's blood on his hands. He did not want it—not because he was conscientious, but he had seen enough of law to hold it in fear, if not in respect. He did not want to pose as a murderer, himself.

He knew that in a personal encounter with

the gallows noose or the electric chair man usually came out second best.

Babe, however, was all in earnest, and he could no longer curb his evil tendencies. He saw Tony hesitate, and he grew angry. With long steps he advanced upon Old Harry, crying:

"I kin do et all alone! Down ye go, by gar!"

Up to this time the detective's aid had been passive, but he suddenly assumed a new aspect.

"Keep off!" he cried. "I'll not have carrion crows around me. If you act ugly you sleep this night in the Tombs!"

The threat was thrown away. Babe was full of pluck, and he gave an illustration of his way of doing business which was rather startling to those he had marked for victims. Old Harry's hands were up for defense, but Babe flung his huge bulk against the wall of defense, and in a twinkling he had the slightly-formed side-partner in his grasp.

"Now your candle goes out!" he declared, savagely.

Old Harry was still full of courage, and he struck Babe in the face, but the blow fell on a hard surface, and it did not seem to be felt. The keeper wrapped his arms around his prey, and then called to Tony:

"Now, end the critter's life!"

Wageline was worried. He had no intention of taking the killing upon himself, but he must do something. He advanced to act his part, but both he and Babe then had a surprise.

Babe was a monster of physical strength, and when his hands were once on his man he imagined it was all over with him. He was yet to learn what activity could do when opposed to brute power.

Suddenly Old Harry writhed in the clutch which was upon him. Just how he did it the bully could never tell, but the hold was broken, and then Babe went over with a shock which jarred the house as a foot caught him in the stomach.

Another moment and Old Harry darted past Tony and gained the door. There he paused and looked back.

"Wageline," he laughed, "I reckon we shall meet again. Our case is not yet done, but the pot is boiling. Ho! ho!"

Tony, startled and dismayed, dropped his hand to his own revolver, but Old Harry had seen enough of the pair. He darted through the hall, and did not pause even when his feet touched the pavement of the street. There was no danger that his enemies would make any headlong rush after him, and when he had sent one swift glance back, and noticed that they stopped at the door, he pursued his way at moderate pace.

"Bad!" he muttered, shaking his head and growling like a bear. "With a little more time I should have had Babe wholly in my net, but Tony had to put in an appearance just when he was not wanted. Well, that settles my association with him, for I couldn't work back into his favor if I would; and it shows them plainly where I stand in this case. From this time on it is an open fight between us."

A pause, and then he added:

"Shall I make another bold push?"

He was thinking of the other end of the game, and there was logic in all he studied upon.

"Stacey and Daisy will soon know of my downfall with Wageline, and I may as well strike while I can. Daisy is weakening. It is impossible to say what is before us in her quarter, but proper care and circumstances could make her throw up the sponge. If I could but see her alone. But Stacey may be in? What of it? I am going to try my luck—it is the last chance."

Acting on this belief, Old Harry took a car and was soon near the flat occupied by Stacey and his wife.

"Ho! ho!" he muttered, as he surveyed the front of the building, "there will soon be merry music there if Rod chances to be in. Fate, oblige me by having him out. Ho! ho!"

Pushing ahead he rung the bell and the street door soon opened. He walked briskly up the stairs, and found Daisy waiting in the hall, near her own door. The place was dark, and she tried in vain to see him distinctly. Then she asked:

"Who is it?"

"Man with a message, madam," coolly replied Old Harry. "Kindly step within and I will not trouble you long."

His manner was polite, and she obeyed. He followed her and closed the door after him. Then they faced each other in her room.

"Oh!" she exclaimed. "is it you

"It is, but who am I?"

"Mr. Hawk, the detective."

"You've guessed it the first pop, madam. Great skill, yours. Now to business. I have come about Paulus Andrews."

"What about him?"

"The arrests are about to be made."

Daisy grew pale perceptibly.

"The arrests?"

"Yes."

"Of whom?"

"Oh! you and the rest who have been in the game."

"Merciful heavens! I did not kill Paulus Andrews!" exclaimed the woman, nervously.

"Well, we don't know just who did the act, but we shall soon know. Nearly all are under arrest, and some of them will soon weaken so as to get the benefit of the clemency to be derived from turning State's evidence. It will be a rush to get under cover. I wonder who will be the one to be saved?"

CHAPTER XXVI.

WAR TO THE BITTER END.

OLD HARRY spoke glibly, as if he was careless of the result, but he took pains to make his utterance distinct, so that every word would sink into Daisy's mind. He did succeed in frightening her.

"Do you say some of—of—that some are already arrested?" she asked tremulously.

"Yes."

"Who?"

"Contrary to professional ethics to tell too much on that head," replied Old Harry, with a smile. "By the way, they seem disposed to roast you."

"Roast me?"

"Yes."

"How?"

"They say you were at the bottom of it all—"

"It is false!"

"I hope you can prove it, but when the first informer has got his story in it will go hard with you, unless he takes back what he has charged you with."

"Why are you here?" suddenly demanded Daisy.

"Wageline sent me to say that there was danger for you. Wageline is true to you."

"He promised to protect us!" exclaimed Daisy.

"Hasn't he done his best?"

"Not if he has let the arrests go on."

"He can't stem the power of all New York. He has done his level best, but it is now a case of each one for himself."

Daisy was silent, her eyes bent on the floor, and her whole mood one of deep thought. Old Harry watched her closely, hoping for the final weakening, but when she looked up her aspect was more firm than before.

"Let them arrest me, if they will," she added, steadily but in a low tone. "I never harmed Paulus Andrews, and they can't harm me!"

"That reminds me," put in the detective, quickly. "I have something here which may interest you."

He brought out a breast-pin and held it before her. Her eyes dilated.

"Where did you get that?" she demanded.

"I found it on the roof near where Paulus was killed. I knew of your going to Babe Brazer to ask him to find the pin for you, the morning after the murder, and I thought this was probably of value to you."

"It is. Give it to me—"

He drew back.

"Are you sure it is yours?"

"Yes."

"Then how can you say you had no hand in the killing of Paulus Andrews?" he swiftly cried.

Suspicion assailed her for the first time.

"Have you been sent here to trap me?" she demanded.

"The innocent cannot be trapped," he coolly answered. "Be at ease, madam, for it is bigger game than you I am after. I know what you are: a feeble woman who has drifted into the power of strong and designing men. I tell you nothing would please me more than to see you get out of your plight. Madam, the hour is at hand when there will be wrecks in this case, and the ones who seize the life-line will fare the best. Why will you go to ruin with such a man as Babe Brazer?—a ruffian in whose body there rests not one honest or decent bone! Seize the life-line! Save yourself!"

"How?"

"Confess!"

"What?"

"The truth about the murder of Paulus Andrews."

"I don't know who killed him!"

"You aided to decoy him to Brazer's. Madam, I swear to you that enough to ruin you is known, and capable of proof. Get in out of the wet; save yourself. You were born for better things than a life in Sing Sing, or the horror of the electric chair."

The detective had waxed dramatic, and his utterance was earnest and solemn. It moved Daisy, and she seemed on the point of giving way, but the instinct of secretion overcame all else.

"I know nothing; I can tell nothing!" she asserted.

"Mad, mad woman!"

"It is true."

"Look you, this is the golden chance. Save yourself! Throw Babe Brazer and Rodman Stacey overboard and tell who killed Andrews, and all I can do to save you from the law shall be done."

Earnest was the speech of the detective—too earnest by far. So much was he occupied with the subject in hand, and so deeply did he interest Daisy, that neither had heard the door open. They did not see that they were no longer alone, and there was no warning to them until a voice, furious with passion and startling from its abruptness, broke in at this point:

"Dog! you have all you can do to save yourself!"

Old Harry wheeled quickly.

Rodman Stacey was there!

For the second time the detective had been most unpleasantly interrupted, and at the most untimely of moments.

"If you want to do any talking here," added Stacey, hotly, "I am the one for you to see."

"Rodman!" exclaimed Daisy.

"What is this fellow doing here?"

"He intruded on me."

"So I thought. He came like a sneak when I was out, but I am here now to talk with him. Yes, and I'll talk so he will not want to call again."

"My dear sir," quickly put in the detective, "I advise you to work your Adam's-apple and give your tongue a rest."

"What do you want here?"

"He was trying to make me confess that we knew of the murder of Paulus Andrews," explained Daisy, anxiously.

"Did you tell him we knew nothing about it?"

"Yes."

"Did he refuse to take your word?"

"He did."

Stacey turned his gaze once more upon the detective. The heat of his passion was being diluted with wholesome fear, and he was not so ready to bully as he had been. Perhaps he knew his own armor was weak—at any rate, he began to realize that it was not wise to quarrel with one he knew to be a detective.

"What else is it? Wageline, your superior has control of the case you seem so interested in. Did he send you here?"

"No."

"Then you had better mind your own business."

"My dear sir, I am of an investigating turn of mind, so I just run in to kill a spare moment—not a spare man. Ho! ho!"

The detective has again assumed his cynical, rolicking manner, and he might have made the scheme work, but just then there was a knock at the door. Stacey opened it, and saw a messenger-boy. Dis-

missing the latter, Stacey hurriedly opened the envelope and read what was there written.

Then his face grew dark, and he wheeled upon Old Harry.

"Traitor!" he exclaimed.

"Have you broken out in a new spot?" coolly inquired the accused man, with a smile.

"I know you as you are—false to Wage-line, and—"

"Ho! ho! So your allies have taken the pains to inform you of the situation. That does not show guilty understanding between you and them—oh! no, it does not!"

"Do you refer to this telegram?"

"Yes."

"It is from no one you know."

Old Harry smiled. He was not so dull as to be fooled by this statement. Well did he realize that the other part of the gang had sent warning to Stacey, and he knew he had moved none too quickly in coming to the flat. Caution would have availed him nothing.

"Better get under the umbrella," he suggested.

"Sir?"

"Confession is good for the man, if not for the soul."

"If you intimate that I have any knowledge of how Andrews died you tell a lie, and I will not endure it."

"What will you do?"

"This!"

With a quick motion Stacey jerked a revolver from his pocket, but he was not destined to use it. Acting with surprising agility for one of his years, Old Harry leaped forward, seized the weapon and wrested it from its owner's grasp.

"This will be safer in my hands," he remarked, quietly. "You might use it on somebody."

He moved to the door, and there faced Stacey. The latter was pale with anger and, perhaps, fear, but he felt his impotence and stood passive. Old Harry smiled again, and then added:

"Take my advice and get under the umbrella!"

With this parting word he went unopposed out of the flat and to the street.

CHAPTER XXVII.

WORKING A CLUE.

"THE fight is fully on, and concealment is no longer the order of the day. They know me as I am—in part—and they will be hot on my track. Very well; I will meet them, and I know what that means. My life will be in danger, and I must guard it and hunt them at the same time. Ho! ho! it will be a pretty struggle!"

This was Old Harry Hawk's comment as he walked away from Stacey's home. He felt all he said, but he was never cooler than when he admitted that his life would now be that of a hunted man.

He went straight to his own home, and was surprised to find two women waiting for him.

One was Minola Alden; the other, Hannah Carter, the washwoman.

"Well, well!" he exclaimed, with a cheery laugh, "this is pleasure two-fold. Beauty never comes singly."

"I'll thank you, sir, not to call me beautiful!" retorted Hannah, with severity. "I am no beauty, but an honest woman who will wash shirts, collars or cuffs as reasonable as anybody, sir."

"Your pardon, madam, and my best wishes for the spotlessness of your wash. Well, ladies, is it business?"

"I had business here," replied Minola, "but it grows trivial when compared with what Mrs. Carter has to say."

"And that is what?"

"I reckon, sir," answered Hannah, "I have a clue to your young man."

"Meaning Mr. Bronson," added Minola.

"Ho! What of him?"

"She thinks she has the clue to his whereabouts," replied Minola, "and it seems more than probable. Have you been told of the man called Dusty Dan who one night invaded my apartment, only to be frustrated by Mr. Bronson?"

"Yes."

"An idle, vicious wretch!" declared Hannah. "I am an honest and hard work-

ing woman, an' it does grieve me sore to be a-rubbin' at the wash tub with much of toil an' sorer when sech a worthless feller waxes rich on thievery."

"Sad, madam; sad. But what do you know?"

"He lives in my neighborhood—more's the pity—an' it is now said he is up in Orange county—I have the name of the place writ down here—an' engaged as valler, or valet, or somethin' like it to a gent; an' I have found out that he was around with them others the night Mr. Bronson was abductionized; an' it is whispered that there is a prisoner into it in Orange county, an'—"

Hannah would have gone on forever, but Old Harry broke in. He wanted the facts, boiled down.

They were hard to get, but the upshot of it all was that tongues were wagging around Hannah's home, and the prevailing rumor was that missing Dusty Dan was acting as guard to a prisoner.

Other things were mentioned, and when all was in, the detective was quite inclined to believe the clue to the lost Essex Bronson was theirs.

"I will go up to Orange county," he decided.

"I'll go, too," replied Hannah.

"Why?"

"I need money, an' ef you are generous you will pay me."

"But as a fighter you would not be in it, madam."

"She has a still better reason," interrupted Minola.

"What?"

"Do you know Dusty Dan?"

"No."

"She does."

"Good! I see I must take her."

"Not a step will I go," averred Hannah, "unless Miss Alden goes along as my chaperone, sir!"

The idea brought a transient smile to Old Harry's face, for if anybody seemed excusable for dispensing with the adjunct she had mentioned, it seemed to be Hannah. He did not combat the plan, however, for he had seen before that Minola was of heroic mold, and he thought she might be of practical use.

He looked at the slip of paper on which Hannah had the name of the town where Dusty Dan was supposed to be, and then a general consultation took place.

The result was that all three left the city on an evening train and made their way to Orange county.

It was dark when they arrived at their destination, but the detective led the way to a hotel and they were enabled to put up there without trouble.

Before starting both Minola and Old Harry had partially disguised themselves by assuming humble clothes fitted for country life—a step Hannah did not need to imitate—and when they arrived they found how happy the changes had been. A fair was about to begin, and strangers of rustic appearance would create no attention then.

Having seen his companion safely ensconced in their room the leader went down to the main room of the hotel. He had no idea of where he was to look for Dusty Dan, but much is often gained by simply keeping one's ears and eyes open, and this he intended to do now. So he mingled alike with citizens and strangers, and proceeded to try his plan.

As most of those present were so deeply bound up in the fair, and the chances of favorite cattle and horses getting certain prizes, that they talked of nothing else, he did not progress very fast for a time, but, finally, he caught sight of some one who had not the look of a farmer intent on exhibiting his produce.

"A city tough!"

So thought Old Harry, and he became watchful and alert.

The man he had marked was slowly moving around among the others, showing the dull inattention of one not in sympathy with his surroundings, and the detective lost nothing.

"He may be a thief come up to work the fair people, but he may not. Let me investigate a bit."

He looked around until he saw a man who,

he thought, was a citizen of the town, and then accosted him.

"Do you know Andrew Bastian, of Minisink?" he inquired.

"No."

"I was wondering if that was he over there with the dirty derby hat on his un-combed hair."

"The party you mentioned is living here, just now."

"Oh! is he? What is his name?"

"Timothy Connor, I believe."

"He don't look like a farmer."

"He is not. He came here only a few days ago, and hired the old Abner Ross farm-house, over on the eastern hill. We don't know much about him, and he must be pretty poor. The house I mention had been given over to the rats for a good many years until he took it."

"Does it satisfy his wife?"

"I don't know as he has any. We have seen only him, and that's all I know. He comes here for a few things to eat, but does not seem very sociable."

Old Harry might have asked more, but he did not think it best. He had gained corroborative evidence, for the fact that the man had come so recently, and that he answered the description of Dusty Dan, was a good deal.

He began to scheme how he could have Hannah get view of the so-called Mr. Connor, but the latter prevented the plan by leaving the hotel. Old Harry went, also. Timothy struck off in an easterly direction, and the detective fell in behind him.

For a considerable time Timothy walked on unconcernedly, but he finally paused and looked sharply toward the rear. The spy had quickly dropped to the ground, and the darkness concealed him from sight. Apparently reassured, Timothy resumed his way. Old Harry did the same.

A long journey had been begun, and it did not end until two miles had been covered. During all that while the follower carried on his plan successfully, though Timothy looked behind many times, and showed the caution of one with a secret to hide, but his care availed him nothing; the spy was too cunning to be caught.

Finally, the leader reached a building, large and dark, but he proved previous knowledge with it by producing a key, unlocking the door and entering.

When the door closed he was seen no more.

Old Harry reconnoitered. A circuit of the house revealed no light at any point, and further examination led to the discovery that all the doors and windows were securely fastened. Nails appeared to have been used freely, and he saw it would be next to impossible to effect an entrance without noise that would call the guardian of the house to the spot.

"And that will not do," decided the detective. "I have no proof that he is Dusty Dan, and I can't afford to get into prison on a mere suspicion. Hannah must have sight of him, but how can it be done? The house is on a dim road which leads off to one side, not that we came. It is the only road, too. Can it be used?"

With this thought in mind Old Harry scouted around considerably, and when he returned to the hotel he had laid his plan. He called on Minola and Hannah.

"Be ready to leave here at the first break of day," he requested.

"Why? Where?" asked Minola.

"We will take the cars and go to the next town to the east. There we will buy or hire a team, and in the forenoon we come back this way, appearing to be three country people traveling by their own conveyance. Unless my plans go all out of plumb we shall bring up near a man of interest, and I reckon there will be a lively fight."

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE DETECTIVE'S TRICK.

It was nine o'clock of the following morning. Along a road which was so dim that it seemed almost to have seen no travel for years, a team was making its way. The country was hilly, and bushes grew so thickly, and so near to the path, that they screened the travelers like a veil—the occupants of

the wagon could not see out of the tangle, nor could they be seen many yards away.

Three persons were in the vehicle. They were Old Harry Hawk, Minola and Hannah.

Both of the women seemed ill at ease. At the very least the ride was not pleasant. The wagon was a box-like concern, with two plain board seats, upon the foremost of which sat the detective-driver, with his charges back of him. A wearisome thing to ride in, as Hannah's frequent complaints proved.

"Shall we never see the end of this?" she grumbled.

Old Harry was in high spirits, and he chuckled and waved his whip.

"Which end do you want to see?" he demanded.

"A civilized one," she retorted, quickly.

"Don't be disappointed if you are unsuccessful."

"It is horrible."

"So it is, honey. But we are moving on. Get up, Julius Caesar! Crack your heels!"

The driver gave the horse a cut with the whip, and the animal hastened its speed until the wagon bounced wildly over the roots and rocks, and the women clung to each other for safety.

"We shall be overturned," remonstrated Minola.

"Ho! ho!" cried the detective, "don't you get faint of heart. How can you feel timid when you have an old farmer like me at the reins? Don't I know a yearling steer from a saw-buck? Get up, Hannibal! Fling your heels! This early morning ride makes one's blood leap in his veins. Ho! ho!"

They struck a place where the ground fell away, and Old Harry gave the horse another cut with the whip. The animal sprang forward so violently that the driver's hat was borne from his head by the wind, but he did not heed it. With his long hair floating behind him he dashed on, chuckling and looking wild enough for a lunatic let loose.

They left the thick bushes behind, but the course was now along a rocky, billy path, and the road was scarcely visible. The wagon often stood on one set of wheels only, and it bade fair to be overturned entirely at any minute.

"Land sakes alive!" bewailed Hannah; "we shall go home corpses, that we shall!"

The detective swung his whip and looked around in high glee.

"Hold hard!" he cried. "We are going to jump that precipice ahead!"

"There does seem to be something of the sort," nervously admitted Minola. "This is folly, I think."

"Never mind the precipice!" retorted Old Harry. "If we live through the jump we will soon have our prey in the toils!"

"I do believe the man has gone crazy!" groaned Hannah.

"Ho! ho!" shouted Old Harry. "this is a new way to hunt an assassin down. Hang on, and I'll show you some choice detective work!"

"You are risking unnecessary danger," exclaimed Minola.

"The man is a-takin' of us ter the slaughter like lambs fettered in the gambles!" moaned Hannah.

"A glorious ride!" cried Old Harry. "Victory or death! Now for the precipice! Hold hard!"

They were dangerously near a bank, but the detective had no intention of doing damage to anybody. His spirits were too high for the pleasure of his charges, but there was no madness in his veins. He swung the horse around so close to a tree that he brushed it, and then rattled along a narrow way past a bluff.

A few rods more, and then he caught sight of a house.

"Fly light!" urged the detective, in a changed voice. "This is our place—don't forget to act wisely."

Then his voice was raised in a shrill addition:

"Danged ef this ain't a sorter mean road, an' we don't seem ter be gettin' nearer the fair, but we kin git some news here, I reckon. Whoa, Napoleon Bonaparte! Dang you! stand still, will ye? Never seen the hoss act so afore, but he must know he's goin' ter the fair. Be calm, gals, an' you shall have the puttiest ribbons the whole county o' Orange kin show. Whoa, Alexander the Great!"

The wearied horse had no desire to do anything more active than to "whoa," but Old Harry kept talking in his shrill voice. He had come up with a good deal of clatter, anxious to be heard by Timothy Connor, and his remarks concerning the fair looked to the same end.

It had been his idea that the man would not open the door to an ordinary party, but keep himself under bolts and bars, and this he had tried to frustrate by early giving the impression that the travelers were simple farming people bound to the fair. They could not break into the house willfully—Hannah must have sight of the man inside, and he must be drawn out by stratagem.

"Say something!" directed the detective, to Minola, in a low voice, as he stood caressing his leg as if he had a rheumatic twinge.

"There don't seem to be any road beyond," she complained, distinctly, "and I do know we are lost. We shall miss the fair."

"Fair?" shouted Old Harry. "Dang it all! I am goin' ter see that fair ef I drive this hoss over all the precipices in Orange county ter do et. Hiram Snow exhibits his yearlin' steers this afternoon, an' I will be there or bu'st, by gosh! Don't you be scared: we'll get the directions, an' then go sailin' along."

With this speech he made his way toward the closed door, but, before he reached it, it was opened and Mr. Timothy Connor stood on the threshold.

He looked wholly unsuspecting.

"Say," cried Old Harry, "where in thunder is the right road ter that blamed fair?"

"Down yonder!" replied the man, pointing.

"That way?"

"Yes."

"How fur away is it?"

"Two miles."

"Sech a road as this all the way?"

"No; it soon improves."

"Tolerable good wagonin', is it?"

"Yes."

"I knew it; I knew I was on the right road. I never git lost, an' I have a pile o' intuition in me, by gosh! Them gals told me I was lost, an' I knowed et was not so. What do ye say now, Hannah?"

The question was asked without turning his head. He had given Mrs. Carter ample time to make sure whether she knew the man, and Old Harry was ready in more than one way for the crisis.

Hannah was eager to have her say.

"That is Dusty Dan!" she exclaimed.

Old Harry's hand had been thrust into his pocket in a way seemingly careless, but it came out now with a jerk. Quick as a flash he thrust a revolver under Dusty Dan's nose.

"Surrender, or you are a dead man!" he cried, sharply.

Dusty Dan had been accustomed to wild life, but, for once, he was taken so by surprise that he was motionless. The detective had judged wisely when he inferred that the man would not open the door to ordinary persons. Dusty Dan's plan had been to keep shut up closely, but he had been deceived by the cunning trick of his foe, and now he found himself reaping the consequences.

He stood and stared at the revolver and its holder.

Minola had her directions from Old Harry, and she hastened out of the wagon and approached the men.

"Here are the manacles," she remarked, coolly.

"Mister Man," added Old Harry, "we are going to put you under a trifle of restraint. You won't be harmed, bodily—not unless you act the fool. It all depends on yourself, you see. Surrender quietly, and you will be all right."

"I will not surrender!" cried Dusty Dan. "Who the fiends are you that tries to—"

"I am a detective!"

"What do you want here?"

"The man you hold prisoner."

"I ain't got no prisoner."

"That remains to be seen. Dusty Dan, don't be a fool. The bottom has fallen out of your scheme, and you will do well to get in under the umbrella and not get wet. Detected as you are, you will be a fool to hang to those who gave you this dangerous work. Yield quietly and—"

"This is my answer!"

With a quick movement the tough flung himself bodily upon Old Harry. The shock was such that both went headlong to the ground, but, once there, they clung to each other like burrs. A desperate struggle began.

Minola was worried, for she did not forget that Old Harry was much older than his adversary, and she ran forward with the revolver. Skillfully she thrust it close to Dusty Dan's head, and then she cried:

"Yield, or I will fire!"

The tough was full of courage, but he knew the meaning of such an argument. With one look into the yawning mouth of the weapon, he loosened his hold.

"Let up!" he requested. "I like a matinee, but this is too perfessional fer my blood. Turn the gun the other way—I ain't hungry for lead!"

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE LOCKED-UP SECRET.

THE relaxation of Dusty Dan's muscles gave Old Harry Hawk the chance he craved, and he promptly slipped the handcuffs upon the fellow's wrists. Dan snarled with rage.

"Say, w'ot is that fer?" he demanded.

"To keep you quiet."

"You promised me mercy."

"You should have deserved it by your conduct, if you wanted it."

The tough had more to say, but the detective gave no further heed to him. After the violent attempt Dan had lost all claims upon him, and Old Harry proceeded to serious business.

"Can you guard him?" was his next question, addressed to Minola.

"I don't see that he can do any harm now."

"Nor I. His only weapons are his legs, and if he tries to run, you have only to pull the trigger and you can wing him as pretty as you please. Do it, if he tries to get up. Watch him, and fire if he acts contrary. Above all, don't let him rise."

"Thunder an' small-pox!" groaned Dan, "this is the day o' my sorrer. Ruin stares me in the face, an' I as innocent as a kid!"

"So is a tiger innercent!" retorted Hannah. "P'izen would be good eatin' along with your goodness!"

Old Harry left the two quarreling, and himself entered the house. He found there was no sign of furnishing in the first rooms, but, when he had pursued his way, he came to a closed and locked door which promised something. He could not afford to go to Dusty Dan for a possible key, so he burst the door in without delay.

The view thus gained made him break into his old cry.

"Ho! ho!"

"What!" cried another voice. "Who is this?"

"Not a thug, by mighty."

"It is Old Harry Hawk."

"Now you are shoutin', Mister Essex Bronson! Raise your octaves high in exultation, for the year of jubilee is come. Ho! ho!"

Essex it was, bound to a log of wood too heavy for him to drag, and with tied hands and feet. A prisoner he surely was, but Old Harry hastened to release him. The two men clasped hands.

"Friend, I owe you much!" exclaimed the younger man.

"Make out your check at your leisure!" laughed the detective.

"I am amazed at this."

"Why?"

"I thought they had me shut up so no human being but themselves knew of me."

"Who are 'they?'"

"Dusty Dan, Babe Brazier and the rest."

"In a word, tell me how it happened. Particulars can be given later on."

"I made a call, one evening, and Babe and his gang ambushed me, forced me into a carriage and brought me here; and here I have been ever since. Dusty Dan was my jailer, and, though I suffered no personal indignity, time has gone wearisomely with me."

"I can well believe it, but the tables are turned. Come out of this den, and I will show you brighter sights. We want to lose as little time as possible on this dreary hill. I gained sight of you by a trick. Now,

I have a wagon to return to its owner, and then I want to get my flock back to New York. Dusty Dan could have gone free, if he had been wise, but he has kicked over the trough of mercy, and now he will get it in the neck, if I may so express myself. He shall be lodged in a prison of my own until I want him to appear in public. Back to New York we go."

This plan involved some hard work, but it was carried out to the letter.

The day was waning when some hours later, Old Harry Hawk trod the streets of the city and neared the house where he had left the wounded sailor. This man had not been out of his mind for many consecutive minutes since he was first found.

"Let me hope the Jack Tar has recovered his senses," the detective muttered, as he rung the bell. "I want to talk with him, and talk with reason back of his forehead."

The ring being answered, Old Harry entered the house.

"How is the patient?" he asked, of the person who admitted him.

"About the same."

"No gain?"

"I don't know. We have been careful not to worry him. He has just awakened from a sound sleep, and if you want to see him it will be a good time."

"I do want to see him," Old Harry replied. "I reckon I have business with him. I'll go in, anyhow."

He entered. The wounded man lay on the bed, his head tied up with a wide bandage, and his whole appearance that of a man who was not likely to be out of bed for some time to come. He raised himself on his elbow as the detective entered and surveyed him sharply, but the visitor's heart sunk as he saw how little of intelligence was expressed in that face.

"How goes it with you?" cheerily asked Old Harry.

"What fiend is this?" demanded the sailor, querulously.

"I am a friend, good sir," was the reply.

"Friend!" echoed the wounded man, bitterly. "You can't deceive me. You seek to take my life!"

"Nonsense, sir! I am not in the killing business. Be at ease; I am here with good intentions. Lie down, and we will soon come to terms. I am the man who saved you from your foes."

The master and mistress of the house, who had been caring for the sailor, were passing in and out of the room as occasion demanded, and the wounded man turned to them with the inquiry:

"Do you know this South Sea cannibal?"

"He is an honest man," answered the person addressed.

"So was Judas honest!" cried the sailor.

"I know you are here to take my life!"

Old Harry had ample patience, and he talked soothingly until this wild notion was abandoned. The patient sunk back on the bed, and soon forgot his fears entirely. Then, in due time, the detective opened on him anew.

"Your name is Sam Lock, I believe?"

"Well, it may be, but I can't tell whether I am Sam Lock, Davy Jones or Sir Humphrey Gilbert."

"Speaking of Jones," quickly put in Old Harry, "what about your messmate, Eben Jones?"

"Never heard of him!"

"Don't you know he was at Babe Brazier's with you?"

"Who is Babe Brazier?"

"Keeper of the sailor's boarding-house on South street."

"I've been in a good many sailors' boarding-houses, but I fail to remember the one you mention. I don't remember any of them. Possibly the Flying Dutchman kept some of them, but I can't remember."

"You saw a murder at Babe's, you know."

"Did I? Well, maybe, but I don't remember."

Old Harry's disappointment was great, but he was not to be baffled without further struggle. He kept it up, and tried in every possible way to get his companion's mind to work. It would not work; he had not only forgotten the past, but when the detective brought up things said at the beginning of

the interview, they, too, were gone. In brief, while the sailor talked with considerable show of method, he forgot each thing as fast as it was dropped from discussion.

"A hopeless case!" finally decided the detective, with a sigh.

Without betraying his thoughts to the wounded man he went out of the room to consult the master of the house. He wished to learn more in detail what the doctor had said of the sick man, and see if there was hope in the future.

His departure left the room to the sailor and the woman of the house. The latter was busy about the place for a few moments, and then she turned toward the second door of the room, to go elsewhere.

Her back being turned, she missed an interesting sight.

The wounded man suddenly raised himself on his elbow again, fixed his gaze keenly on something near the door which led to the hall. He did not do this without good cause—there was a new-comer in the room.

A man had silently, secretly entered, and then stood by the door with the air of one who acts the part of an intruder.

It was Tony Wageline.

He shot a glance first at the retiring woman, and then at the patient. The sailor returned the gaze just as fixedly, and then his lips parted again.

He gave Tony a shock.

"I know your purpose," was the exclamation, "I am to be killed this night, and you are here to do it!"

The woman had disappeared, and Tony took heart as he saw that there was no prospect of an immediate outbreak. He moved closer to the wounded man, his steps soft and careful, but a glance in the direction the woman had gone showed that she had passed on into the next room.

"Well, assassin," added the sailor, "what do you want now?"

"Be calm!" Tony replied. "I will do you no harm."

"Then why are you here?"

"Yes," added another voice, "why are you here, Wageline?"

"Tony wheeled. Then he stood facing Old Harry Hawk."

CHAPTER XXX.

A DANGEROUS MAN.

THE crook detective had done his work carefully, and he had hoped to escape unpleasant consequences, but the hope faded away. Old Harry was there, and there could be no doubt as to how he would be received by his ex-side-partner.

It was war between the broken associates, and Old Harry was too cunning to be hoodwinked.

Old Harry's eyes were glittering with feeling he rarely manifested, and when he found Wageline for the time speechless, he sharply added:

"Scoundrel, why are you here?"

Tony flushed under the epithet and the tone which accompanied it.

"I reckon I am free to go where I please," he retorted.

"And I reckon you are not! This is a private house, and you have no business in it. More, you will not be tolerated in it!"

"I won't?"

"No!"

"You speak gamely, but who are you? The dog of my will; the creature of my service."

"Not now, Wageline."

"Old Harry!" sneered Tony; "the half-crazy doer of my dirty work!"

"I have been the helper of your detective cases, but, thank Heaven! not the participant in unlawful deeds, nor the sharer in the bribes by which guilty men and women have gained immunity from arrest at your hands."

"Bribes?" echoed Wageline.

"That's what I said."

"Do you know what you are talking about?" demanded Tony, trying to be sharp, but unable to hide the tremor in his voice.

"I do, Wageline. You have run a fairly successful career as a detective here in New York, but only because you are cunning. How has your cunning been used? Not all in tracing out crime. No, Wageline; no! When you have your man dead to rights is

the time when your craft has shown chiefly, for then you have made terms with him. There are men in prison whom you tracked down, but more out of it, for you seldom carried things to an extreme if you could make him buy himself off, and it was a poor wretch who could not give a pittance—and all was grist that came to your mill."

"Do you dare—"

"Men talk about the crooks of New York, but they little suspect how many there are under that head who are trusted officers of the law. No; let not that statement go so strong. Thank Heaven! the detectives of the city are, as a rule, thoroughly honest, but it is not so with you. There is not a bigger crook in town than you, Wageline!"

It was strong language, but the strength did not all lie in the words. Old Harry was worked up to a feverish pitch, and though his course was systematic, he hurled the accusations at his old employer like so much of grape-shot.

Despite the fact that his breaking away had been certain before, Tony was now amazed at the stand of his "side-partner."

He had not thought Old Harry capable of the manly strength he was showing, and the new departure was a warning to Tony that he had one to deal with that he had need to fear.

"You talk wildly," he muttered.

"Humph!" was the only reply.

"I never took a bribe from anybody."

"Wageline, you lie magnificently."

"You have called me—"

"A crook!"

"And a receiver of bribes."

"Yes."

"Can you prove that I ever took a dollar thus?"

Old Harry grew wary. If he should see fit, in the future, to accuse his whilom employer, it would be reckless to show his hand now.

"I said nothing about proof."

"So you have charged me with crime without any legitimate reason, have you?"

"Wageline, we waste words."

"So you do!" echoed the sailor from the bed. "What is all this nonsense about? You talk more, and say less, than any men I ever knew. Why beat about the bush? Come to the point!"

He was ignored, and Old Harry suddenly demanded:

"What do you want here, Wageline?"

"He wants to murder me!" cried the wounded man, excitedly. "I have discovered the whole vile plot—I am to be killed!"

His finger pointed to the Crook Detective, but he was dealing with men not to be moved by small things.

"Well, I await your explanation," pursued Old Harry.

"I have none to give," admitted Wageline, awkwardly. "I wanted to see what you were doing here. You have slipped the leash I had on you so long, and I was curious to see what manner of fish or fowl you had here. Call it an intrusion, since it was one; but I came in to learn more of you."

"Have you done it?"

Tony's gaze strayed to the bed.

"Who is this man?"

"Is that any of your business, Wageline?"

"Possibly not."

"It surely is not. If you want trouble with me you will allow abnormal curiosity to get the bulge on you still further; if not, you will mind your own affairs and let me alone. Do you see?"

"Yes."

"Which will you do?"

"You are a cantankerous fellow, Hawk, and I want no more of you."

Tony's chief desire, now he was detected, was to get away unmolested, and he turned toward the door. Old Harry had to make a quick decision. Should he let him go? If he did not, what was he to do with him?

"I can't seize him," thought the ex-side-partner; "he must go."

Thus, he followed Tony in silence as the latter progressed toward the street door, and no more was said, even when that point was reached. Growing bolder, when liberty was assured, Tony turned to give his former associate a chance to speak.

The men looked each other in the eyes.

Neither broke the silence.

Several seconds passed while that fixed regard was maintained, but it must end finally, and the end was impressive. Without a word Wageline at last turned again and went down the steps. Satisfied that he was not to be molested, he walked off down the street.

Old Harry remained at the door until his late companion disappeared entirely, and then shook his head and went back inside.

"I would rather have the ill-will of a hundred Babe Brazers," muttered Old Harry, "than of one Tony Wageline. As far as I know it has never been his way to do murder, but there's no knowing what he might do when his official head was in danger. He knows it is in danger now, and he will be heard from. How? When? What will be the weapon with which he will strike at me?"

The usual frivolity of the man had vanished, and well it might. There was an oppression on his spirits like a load of lead. He had courage, but he knew Tony Wageline—he knew the detective's skill, malevolence and power.

"What will become of my case now?" wondered the ex-side-partner. "It would be like Wageline to swear to some lie against me, and thus have me falsely arrested. Will he strike thus? If he does, I shall not be the only one to suffer. It will go hard with Bronson and Miss Alden, for Tony will have to crush out all opposition. How will he strike?"

Beset with these gloomy forebodings, Old Harry returned to the room where the wounded sailor lay. He paused and stood gazing at the man. Why had fate wrapped his mind in oblivion just when its clearness was so much needed?

With a sudden, impulsive motion the detective advanced to the bed.

"Man!" he exclaimed, "who and what are you?"

"Ha! ha!" chuckled the other, "so you seek to pry into my secrets, do you? Want to know all about me, so you can carry out your vile plots, do you? Why not murder me, at once?"

"I am your friend, you blockhead. Have we not taken good care of you here? Could any one have fared better than you? Reward me, now! Use your wits. Is your name Sam Lock?"

"Ha! ha! More of plot and trickery! You want to get me in your power. You want to ruin me."

"Fool!" harshly exclaimed Old Harry.

"I'm too wise for you!" was the quick retort.

"Clear your muddled head. If you are Sam Lock, where is Eben Jones?"

"Never knew him!" declared the sailor, but there was a cunning expression on his face, as if he was hiding something, and felt himself doing a great deed thereby.

"How about Babe Brazers' house?"

"Never heard of it!"

"And the murder you saw done there?"

"Never saw a murder done there in my life, or elsewhere."

"Fool! fool!"

Bitter was the detective's speech, and there was cause for it. It was hard to be so near the truth, and yet have all locked up in a mind given over to absolute darkness.

He turned away in disgust.

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE LAMPLIGHTER'S PAST.

CHIMMIE DUNN was making a visit. He had the good judgment to admire Lil the Lamplighter, and when he could take any time from the selling of suspenders he found his way to the rooms where she lived. On this occasion, John Maines, being a little better of his rheumatism, had gone out for an airing, and the young people had it all to themselves.

Chimmie leaned back in a chair and was happy.

"Lil," he said, "you an' me are getting along in life a good bit, ain't we?"

"What do you mean?" she inquired.

"We're older than we was."

"Why, of course."

"I wonder about wot age folks thinks o' gettin' married. Lil?"

The Lamplighter blushed.

"Dear me, I don't know," she answered.

"Depends a good 'eal on w'ot time they start out in mercantile life, don't it?"

"Maybe so."

"I started young, an' so did you. Eh?"

"I suppose so."

"I know it. I began ter sell suspenders w'en I was no bigger than a perleeceman's billy. I've done pretty wal at it, too, Lil."

"Have you?"

"Yes, an' now I'm bigger, I'm thinkin' I shall want somebody ter share my pwosperity with me. I s'pose I shall have ter wait until I'm eighteen or nineteen years old, but each day brings that nigher. Ain't I right?"

"Ye-es," admitted Lil, looking at the floor.

"Well, I want ter say a word in private ter you. I can't get married without a minister an' a girl ter help me. Ministers are plenty, but the right sort o' girls are scarce as hen's teeth, pretty near. I can't take no chances, so I want ter ask you not ter take up with no other feller until you give me a chance. Lil, I think you're the sweetest specimen I've seen in a long while, an' I like you a pile. Will you give me the first chance? Let us settle this right off, fer I—"

A rap sounded at the door.

Both the young people sprung to their feet, Lil blushing more deeply than ever, and Chimmie confused and angry.

"Shoot it!" he muttered.

"Somebody is there," faintly murmured the girl.

"Sure pop, an' I reckon it is Muggs Noons, after me. Tell him I ain't been here, an' I'll hide."

Chimmie made a headlong dive and disappeared in the second room, while the rap again sounded. Lil felt that she was not in mental condition to meet anybody, but she had to do something, and she finally rallied somewhat and went toward the door just as the knocker, becoming impatient, tried the knob and opened it from the outside.

Then a voice sounded.

"Oh! excuse me; I thought nobody was in."

"A woman, by jinks!" muttered Chimmie. "W'ot fer is she doin' here?"

He tried his gaze at the crack in the half-open door near him, and could see as well as hear. A surprising tale his eyes told him.

"Jiminy crickets!"

It was not strange that Chimmie was moved to make the exclamation. The newcomer was Daisy Edwards, and he was enough in the mysteries of the detective case to be interested in anything which pertained to it.

Lil was surprised, too, but she did not know so much of the case as Chimmie did, and she took it more quietly. Daisy was looking at her fixedly, and there was a pause while she was getting over her first impressions.

Suddenly she spoke again.

"Are you all alone, my child?"

"No, you are with me," replied Lil, somewhat flippantly, for she did not admire the visitor.

"A joke out of place, I admit. Well, will you let me sit down, my dear?"

"There is lots o' chairs here."

It was an ungracious answer, but Daisy disregarded it and took a seat. She looked briefly around the humble room, but at Lil again, presently, with deeper interest.

"Who does the work of this house, my child?" she asked.

"I guess it's somebody about my size," replied Lil.

"All alone?"

"Yes."

"It is too much for you."

"Work an' me gets along all right."

"Have you always had to work?"

"Sure!"

"You ought to have a better life."

"See here!" exclaimed Lil, "w'ot bee have you got in yer bunnit?"

"What do you mean?"

"Why are you so interested in my business?"

"Not from any unfriendly motive, I do assure you—quite the contrary. You remember the night I came here—"

"With a detective!" dryly put in Lil.

"Never mind that. On that occasion I saw you, and I became interested in your welfare. Since then I have learned something more about you. I am told that the John

Maines with whom you live is not your father, but that you were adopted by him. May I ask the names of your own parents?"

"I can't see w'ot fer the world you want ter know, but they was Peter and Bridget Lawson."

"Lawson!" echoed Daisy, disappointed.

"Yes."

"Where are they now?"

"I heard they was dead—drunked themselves to death. Fine family I come from, ye see."

"Are you sure their names were Lawson?"

"If they had licked you as often as they did me you would not have any doubt. Yes, I am dead sure of it."

Daisy was silent. She kept her gaze fixed on Lil, and with her disappointment there seemed to be a good deal of doubt and uncertainty.

"Looking fer signs o' Peter an' Bridget?" suddenly, flippantly demanded Lil, still impressed unfavorably with her caller.

"You say you are sure they are dead?"

"No, I didn't say so. I told you I heerd they was dead. I didn't attend the funerals, an' I didn't want ter. All I asked o' Peter an' Bridget was that they would keep away from me."

"Where did they live?"

Lil gave the street and number. Daisy seemed to make a mental note of the fact, and then she abruptly aroused again.

"Child," she said, "this life is not the life you ought to lead."

"Who told you?" retorted Lil.

"Do not understand me, my dear. If I say that, it is not to deal in idle words. I am disposed to help you, if you will let me; to raise you above this life to something better. Allow me to have my way in this, and it will be to your good. Child, how would you like to have a good home to live in, with no work to do, and a chance to go to school?"

"Me? Laws! I never could learn nothin'!" declared Lil. "But, see here! What are you drivin' at anyhow? W'ot do you care about my welfare? Do you care fer it, or is this all a trap fer my feet?"

"I speak only for your good, my dear. I have been interested in you ever since I saw you the night I came here, and I would gladly help you. Do not refuse the chance! Will you leave want and poverty, and go to a good home?"

"Not until I see it!" declared the girl. "Castles in the air don't go with me, ye see. Before I take anything o' the sort I should have ter know more about you than I do. Who be you? Who recommends ye?"

"That I cannot tell you, at present, but before I ask you to do anything definite I will let you know enough to satisfy you."

The practical turn of Lil's mind seemed to have disconcerted Daisy, and she rose. She moved toward the door, and then paused.

"Keep my proposal in mind," she added.

"and see if it does not grow upon you. I want to do you good, and I trust I shall have the chance. For now I will leave you, but it is with an object in view. I go to assure myself of certain things, and to prepare for the help I wish to vouchsafe you. For now, good-by!"

Hurriedly, as if afraid she would be stopped, Daisy passed out of the room, and then her steps were heard on the stairs. Chimmie Dunn emerged from his covert.

"Wal, I'll be jiggered!" he exclaimed.

"W'ot do you make o' that fer a lunatic asylum?" inquired Lil.

"I make et out to be something you want ter dodge. Ef you want your hair ter hold on, jest you fight shy o' that damsel, by gosh!"

In the mean while Daisy had gone to the street. She hurried away without a look backward, and thus escaped seeing something that might have been of interest to her.

When she came out a man emerged from a deep doorway and gazed after her.

This man was Babe Brazer's ally, Tim O'Killen!

"By thunder! I reckon Babe was right!" he muttered. "The woman is goin' crooked, or else why should she be in the house where Andrews was found dead? She means treachery, an' she will have to be disposed of. She's got ter go where Andrews is, or our name is Mud. She must be silenced!"

CHAPTER XXXII.

THE ALARM IN THE DANCE-HALL.

Essex BRONSON was alone in his room when a visitor was announced, and Old Hawk put in an appearance.

"Anything new?" asked the detective, abruptly.

"Not with me," replied Essex.

"No sign that we are being shadowed by our foes?"

"No."

"Have you looked?"

"I don't know that I have, in particular, but I have obeyed your caution and been prudent."

"Read that!"

Old Harry tossed a slip of paper toward his companion, and on it Bronson found these words in irregular writing:

"MR. HAWK:—Can you call and see me this evening, ten o'clock? I have something of importance to say, and you will be glad to hear it. I think I can explain something, especially as you want to find a certain sailor. This evening is the only time I can spare, for my ship sails to-morrow. Hoping to see you, I am,

"Yours very truly,

"ERASTUS CONNESS.

"P. S.—This name is as good as any."

Essex looked up.

"Well?" questioned Old Harry.

"The letter is to you," reminded Bronson.

"What do you make of it?"

"Where did you get it?"

"Left by a messenger when I was out."

"What more do you know about it?"

"Nothing."

"But you think—what?"

"If there is not a trap in it, then my eyesight is not good."

"Do you think our foes are trying to decoy you?" Essex asked.

"That is just my notion."

"You may be right."

"Consider the points of the case. At the foot of the note you will see an address. It is in a section of the city little less noted as a resort of sailors than in South street. If there is a fraud it is intended to give an air of plausibility to the thing by all this. But if this so-called Conness wants to see me, why didn't he come to me?"

"It would have been the natural way, I should say."

"Observe the postscript. 'This name will do as well as any other.' At first sight one would say a plotter would make a mistake in adding that, but it appears to me more evidence of cunning. The suggestion that I am to meet somebody who does not tell all in the letter remains, and, with it, the bold suggestion of an assumed name. Am I not expected to argue that this frankness is proof of innocence and good faith?"

"It may be so."

"I suspect this note, but I am going to see the man," declared Old Harry.

"I will go, too."

"Are you willing?"

"Certainly."

"Then come along. Meet me at the proper hour, and we will sift this thing to the bottom. It may be all right, but this much I say to you: If you want to come out of it with a whole hide, take a revolver with you."

"I will."

Old Harry lingered for some time longer, and the matter was more thoroughly discussed. When he went away they had the idea still in mind that the night was likely to bring them serious trouble. Old Harry looked to get evidence that Tony Wageline was behind it all, if they ever gained anything.

During the period of waiting, Essex carefully arranged his two revolvers for work. He was a law-abiding citizen, and it seemed strange to him to carry such things in New York, but it would not do to slight any measure of personal safety.

He met the detective at the place agreed upon.

"Since I saw you," remarked Old Harry, "I have been out in disguise and taken a look at the house. I was tempted to go in and inquire for the so-called Conness, but I decided to carry out the plan."

"Have you seen anything suspicious?"

"No."

"All may be well."

"Snow may fall in summer," dryly replied Old Harry.

The discussion was not prolonged. They walked quietly to the house they were to visit, and found a man dressed as a sailor at the door, evidently enjoying the view.

"Friend," said the detective, "we want to see Erastus Conness."

"Well, why don't you, then?" was the flip-pant reply.

"Is he inside?"

"Don't know. I am a stranger here—just got in on my ship."

"Can you inquire if he is there?"

"I ain't a servant when I'm on shore. If you want to go in, go ahead."

The speaker was ungracious, and they bothered no more with him. Passing on, they entered the house, which seemed free to all.

"Looks a bit promising," decided Old Harry. "If it was a plot they would be likely to set a man at the door who would be civil. Hallo! what have we here?"

He had pushed open another door, and the sight beyond was unexpected. He saw a room of considerable size, and fairly well filled with people. Some of the latter were in sailor costume, and some were dressed very differently. The latter were women, and the members of both sexes were on their feet.

Just then music struck up, and the inmates began to whirl about.

"A dance!" Bronson exclaimed.

"Sure enough! It's an occasion gotten up for the sailors, and they are making the most of it. Well, this is another surprise. Where do we come in? How are we to find our man?"

"This can't all be a plot. Surely, so many would not be taken into it. The game is genuine, anyhow. But how about Mr. Conness?"

"We must interview somebody here, and see if Conness is a thing of fact; though, if he sails under his false name, I don't see how we can do much until he sees fit to develop himself."

They stood quiet, waiting for some sign, but they did not attract any attention, and the man whom they were to meet did not put in an appearance. Old Harry grew weary of the delay.

"Our unknown is not with us, and these other people are. It is not what we called for."

"This is not wholly a pleasant crowd," remarked Essex.

"Jack Tar is on shore, and this is a plan to beguile him of his cash. These women dancers are the flippant damsels of the locality, and they like the dancing, not to mention Jack and his money. Bronson, we can't stand here, and there are no seats just here; but I see something that looks like sub-room over yonder, and there we may as well go. Come with me."

They moved forward, and found that the sub-room was an alcove. In that place numerous men, all of whom seemed to be sailors, were seated with pipes and drinks for company, for they were not of total abstinence principles.

Old Harry and Essex sat down, still creating no attention out of the ordinary line, and waited. It was already the hour at which they were to meet the unknown, but he did not come to them.

Wondering at the situation they sat in growing impatience, but they were not to go out without something to stir their blood. A sailor had seated himself close to the pair, but he gave no sign of interest until several minutes had passed. Then he leaned further toward Essex, and spoke in a tone so low that it was barely audible.

"Say, do you know you are in danger?"

Essex was quick-witted, and, as he realized the caution of the man, he imitated it well.

Controlling himself fully, he did not even turn his head.

"What do you mean?" he inquired.

"You have enemies here."

"Who?"

"Don't know their names. Be sure you don't look too sharply for them. This is a hard place, and a hard crowd, except for the sailors who are here. I have heard men plan to do you up here—as I understood it, they lured you here for that purpose. I don't see them now, and you want to do something before they again put up their glims. You want to hustle out."

"Do you say we were lured here to be 'done up'?"

"So I understood it."

"In that case," admitted Essex, coolly, "we must fight or run."

"Don't fight. There are honest men here, but they would be so slow to take sides that you could not count on their help. Skip!"

Old Harry had been listening in silence. Now he nodded.

"We had better," he decided.

"Don't try the main door, for you would be cut off. See yonder side-door?"

"Yes."

"Follow me in there."

The speaker rose and moved according to his

plan, and his two companions went with him. He opened the door, and they all went on. They entered a small room, but there they had an unpleasant surprise. They came face to face with several other men, and the latter at once became interested. The foremost uttered a sharp cry.

"They are giving us the slip!" he exclaimed. "Drop on them, men, and let the work be quick. Down with them!"

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE DARK DREAD.

MINOLA ALDEN was pursuing her way on a down-town street, the afternoon of the same day when Old Harry and Essex were waiting to make their call. Deeply as she was interested in the Paulus Andrews case, she had other things to look out for, and her professional duties could not be neglected. This was the business which occupied her time on this occasion.

All this was forgotten, however, when she suddenly saw a familiar face among the people she was meeting.

"Daisy Edwards!" she murmured.

It was, indeed, that person, but she had no longer the light and confident air which had marked her in the past. Minola noticed the change in a moment, and it impressed her deeply.

"What has come over the woman?" was the mental inquiry. "The expression on her face is almost pathetic, and it is wholly scared."

She had used a good term. Scared Daisy did look, and it created many inquiries in the woman reporter's mind.

Daisy's pace was not rapid. She seemed to have a heavy load on her own mind, and it affected her motions. The once-confident adventuress was treading the streets of New York as if she expected some great calamity to overtake her.

Minola was not forgetful of the belief of Old Harry Hawk that the female ally of the chief plotter was weakening, and she yielded to a sudden decision and approached her.

"Pardon me," began the reporter, "but will you let me speak with you for a moment? I may be a stranger to you, but—"

Daisy had made a nervous start, but she grew unexpectedly cool when she saw who had addressed her.

"I know you well," was the prompt answer.

"You are Miss Alden."

"You are right. Now, may I speak with you?"

"What have you to say?"

"I want to speak of a matter of great importance—"

"I can guess what. I have nothing to say about Paulus Andrews."

"Will you still connect yourself with those too wicked for you to give allegiance to?"

"I suppose you mean—"

"Chiefly, Rodman Stacey."

"What would you have me do?"

"Tell all you know!"

"I know nothing."

"You can explain how Paulus Andrews died."

"I do not know; I swear it."

"But you have a clear suspicion."

"No."

"Is not Stacey guilty?"

"No."

"Babe Brazier, then."

"Not he."

"At least, you lured Andrews to Babe's house."

"We did, but the man escaped us. I do not know the explanation of that mystery. We lured Andrews, hoping to— Well, never mind what our plans were. He escaped us, and that is all I know."

"At least, tell the full particulars—"

"I have told you too much already; do not ask for more."

"Are you so bound up in Stacey that you will range yourself with wrong, and against law and justice?"

"I do not go into such elaborate analyses, and you would not if you were situated as I am. Do you know what it is to feel your life is hunted?"

The speaker's voice trembled, and she gazed at Minola with eyes which were full of pathos, and of the fear which had come upon her.

"Have you broken with Stacey?"

"No; there is no trouble between him and myself, but there are other persons than he. There is"—Daisy paused, shivered, and then added in a hushed voice—"there is Babe Brazier!"

"You fear violence at his hands?"

"I do, and there is cause. The man mistrusts me, and that means a good deal. Rodman has defended me, but the suspicions of the man Brazier remain. I was not always a coward, but recent events have weakened my will. I fear Babe Brazier!"

Again she shivered, and Minola was encouraged in spite of her refusals to speak. Once let the stream be set flowing, and light would fall on the night when Paulus Andrews died.

"You look weary and worn out," pursued Minola. "Come with me to a house near at hand and rest."

"What house?"

"It is kept by John Maines, a lamplighter."

Minola noticed another start. Daisy's manner had been stubborn when she asked the last question, but her appearance abruptly changed.

"Is—is—"

Thus far she spoke, and then stopped short.

"What would you ask?" returned Minola.

"Nothing. I will go with you."

There was a perceptible eagerness under a thin mask, and Minola did not seek to penetrate the new mystery, though she had opinions of her own. She led the way, and they were soon knocking at the door where John Maines lived. It was something of a surprise when it was opened by Chimmie Dunn, but the boy was quick-witted enough to make the situation easy for all.

"Walk in," he promptly requested. "I was just a-goin', an' I'll leave you ter Miss Lillian Rose Maines. She's the boss here."

The suspender-seller turned around quickly, winked to Lil, and then hurried into the second door of the room. He and Lil knew this would keep him within listening distance, but, to all appearances, he had, indeed, gone away.

Minola led the way, and the two women entered. Lil was surprised at the visit, but she was not one to lose her self-possession. She faced them coolly.

Seeing that the girl was not going to do the part of hostess, Minola took the office on herself.

"Help yourself to a seat, Miss Edwards," she directed.

Daisy seemed not to hear. She simply stood and stared hard at Lil, much to the disgust of that young lady.

"Say," she exclaimed, "I ain't a two-headed cow, nor a bearded woman. Do you ketch on?"

"Lil!" warningly murmured Minola.

"Well, I don't care!" declared Lil. "I ain't on exhibition, by a long shot, an' the monkey business makes me tired. That may not be polite, but it's solid sense, so now!"

"Pardon me!" faltered Daisy.

"All right, only don't do so no more."

Lil turned and sat down by the window, and then Minola placed a chair for Daisy and succeeded in getting her seated. Stacey's ally had come out of her newest mood, and was something like herself.

"Now," resumed the woman reporter, "we can talk freely. I wish to speak on the subject before referred to, and I am sure that mature deliberation will show you the wisdom of acting as I suggest. Free yourself from the gang by which you are surrounded, and confess all, and—"

"Hush!"

Quickly Daisy turned her gaze upon Lil.

"You can speak safely."

"No, no; not here."

"Then what are we to do?" demanded Minola, annoyed.

"I did not think of all, but now I cannot agree to speak except in private. I would not willingly have her hear—"

Daisy stopped short, as if she had expressed too much, but Lil came into the conversation glibly.

"Mebbe you think it's a rare treat to be the swim now, but you are off the roost!"

"Lillian, that is shocking language!" reproved Minola.

"You can't get honey from a wasp!" retorted Lil. "You two live in luxury an' high tonedness, but I don't an' I talk like I'm used to. Don't you worry about me, though; I ain't in this sociable, an' I don't want ter be. You shall have all the chance you want ter hobnob, an' I will go out an' give you clear swing. I hope you will get fat on it."

The Lamplighter was not sharp in her remarks, but perfectly good-natured, now, and her speech was free and easy accordingly. She rose and started to leave the room—a movement which brought her near to Daisy, and brought other things in its train, too.

Daisy suddenly reached out, seized Lil, drew her to her bosom and pressed passionate kisses upon her lips.

Taken wholly by surprise Lil had to submit to this treatment for a time, but when she recovered her wits a little she began to struggle stoutly.

"Say, let up on that!" was her command.

"You just let me alone, or you will get set on by my defenders. You will so!"

Daisy released her.

"I beg your pardon, my dear," she humbly murmured.

"The best way to be forgiven is not ter do anything deservin' ter be set down on," practically retorted Lil. "Ugh! you make me feel creepy!"

Thump! thump! thump!

It was a heavy knock at the door, and Lil, smarting under the sense of her injuries, moved quickly forward and opened to the applicant. Two rough-looking men entered hurriedly.

"Here they are!" one of the pair exclaimed.

"We have them!"

CHAPTER XXXIV.

THE BLOW FALLS.

It was striking language, and to Daisy it seemed ominous. She rose to her feet, her color changing, and gazed at them with dilating eyes. Minola was calmer, and she was about to speak when Lil the Lamplighter found voice ahead of her.

"What's chewin' you?" demanded the girl of the streets, in her peculiar fashion.

"We want them," replied one of the intruders, pointing to Minola and Daisy.

"Want us?" echoed Minola. "Why?"

"We are here to arrest you."

"Arrest us!"

"So I said."

"For what reason?"

"You will find out when you get ter Police Headquarters. All you have to do is jest to go along with us, and we will do the rest. See? Get up an' amble!"

He moved toward the woman reporter, while his companion advanced upon Daisy. Even with the avowed power of the law back of them they did not lose the evil aspect noticed in them at the start, and Minola felt more of personal fear than awe of law.

"Keep away from me!" she exclaimed. "I have done nothing to merit arrest, and I will not yield tamely."

"Et don't make a bit of difference whether you yield tamely or not; you've got ter yield, an' that's all there is to it."

There was an evident disposition on the part of the men to rush matters, and they gave their marked victims little time to think or act. Both Minola and Daisy were to be seized at once when Chimmie Dunn broke forth from the inner room.

He placed himself in front of the intruders.

"Hold yer hosses!" he commanded.

"What's that?" cried one of the strangers.

"Put on the brakes!"

"What do ye mean?"

"That this ain't no infant asylum, by jinks! Take us fer innocents, do ye? Ef ye do you will find us babies with the measliest claws you ever run up against. See? Shy off!"

"Eh?"

"Shy off!"

"Do you mean ter interfere?"

"I should tremulo! Ef you try yer games on this outfit there will be loose hair enough in about two shakes ter fill a piller-case."

"Don't fool with that kid!" cried the second man.

"Out o' the way, youngster, or I'll—"

"Don't bite off more than you kin chew, mister! Keep yer distance, or you'll run up where a riot has its teeth sharpened. Arrest these folks, will ye? Wal, I guess not!"

"Yes, we will, an'—"

"Show your warrant."

"We don't need one."

"You do by law, an' as fer this case, why, you'll need a Gatling gun ter do the job without the little warrant. See?"

"Boy," exclaimed the man, evidently worried by the stout opposition, "if you make trouble you will be arrested, too."

"Not without a warrant! Now, sheer off, or I'll make it hot for you, old man."

"Give him one under the chin!" ordered Man Number Two.

"You won't give him nothin'!" asserted Chimmie. "Ef you've got a warrant, show it. Ef you ain't got none, I know you're not real officers, but toughs tryin' ter play the game."

Minola caught at the idea.

"I think it is so," she exclaimed. "You are not officers."

The pair exchanged glances.

"Get away with them!" was the order.

They moved to the attack, but Lil joined Chimmie, and the youthful couple stood like rocks in the way.

"Smash them, ef they touch ye, Chimmie!" urged Lil, in the language of the streets.

One of the men, angered by the words, turned upon the girl.

"So you're their friend, are you? Then I reckon I know of a way to bring them to terms."

Promptly he grasped Lil, raised her in his arms, and started to bear her off. That was where he made his great error; when Daisy saw the child in peril she sprung at the abductor like a wildcat, and her finger-nails marked his face with lines of red.

"Leave her alone, villain!" the adventuress panted.

Never was order obeyed more promptly. Human speech might fall lightly on his ears, but he was impressed in a double sense by the keen nails. He dropped Lil and staggered back, putting his hands to his face. When he took them away Lil, accustomed to wild life, burst into a laugh of genuine merriment.

"Well, ef you ain't got a map on your mug I ain't got eyes ter see!"

The map, as she was pleased to call it, was there. It was one of the scratches from which blood was oozing, and it furnished ample proof that woman's weapon was nails in more than newspaper assertion.

"The tigress!" finally gasped the victim of Daisy's skill.

"This is played!"

The last exclamation was from the second intruder, and he spoke with wisdom. He saw that besides the two women they had resolute children to deal with, and to defy the united force was far more than they could do unless they resorted to violence of pronounced kind.

"Shonny!" he added, sharply.

"What?" groaned the marked man.

"Skip!"

"Done!"

They were of one mind, and with quick steps they moved toward the door. Chimmie Dunn bestirred himself and sprung in front of them, but he was tossed over on a chair unceremoniously.

When he rose the men were clattering down the stairs.

"Come on!" he cried. "We'll chase them an' git a perleeceman, an' then we'll see ef they kin wipe their brogues on our necks. Come on, an' be lively!"

"Let them go!" requested Daisy.

"What's that?"

"Obey her wishes," added Minola. "I, too, am reluctant to bring notoriety and trouble upon ourselves. Miss Edwards, why did they come, and what was their object?"

"I know not, but I suspect they were sent by Babe Brazier to kidnap me. I learn a lesson from it, and I will hasten home at once. This is not a safe place for me. I will go."

"I will accompany you as far as—"

"No, it cannot be. I am suspected already, and I dare not be seen on the street with you. Let me go alone."

Daisy was hastily arranging her out-door garments.

"But you have not told me what I asked at the beginning."

"I can tell nothing; do not ask more. I must go—I must!"

Minola was reluctant to yield, but she was so moved by Daisy's mingled agitation and firmness that she said no more. She saw the adventuress hurry out of the house without saying more.

Daisy shivered as she reached the street. The twilight shadows were beginning to fall, and she feared to be out after dark, now that matters had grown so serious with her. Dark it not yet was, and she gained the Elevated Road without adventure. By this conveyance she reached home in safety.

She found Rodman Stacey in the flat.

During the revelations which had been coming to her she had been uncertain how Stacey stood, but it was a great relief to see him. She was his wife—it was natural she should look to him for sympathy and protection now.

He rose at her entrance, but, when she caught sight of his face, the expression it bore frightened her. There was no sympathy there; there was no kindness, even.

"Rodman!" she half-unconsciously faltered.

"Woman!" he replied, in icy tones, "I have been waiting for you."

"Why?"

"To see the Judas of my life."

"Judas?"

"So I said."

"What do you mean?"

"That your race is run to the end. You have pretended to be my friend, but—"

"I am your friend—your friend and your wife."

"More!" he hissed; "you are a Judas! Woman, you have fooled me well, but you can do it no longer. I have gained light on your course; I know that, all the while you have been assuming to sympathize with me, you have been in communication with the officers, that accursed Bronson and the female spy—"

"Never, as a traitress."

"You lie!" he roughly exclaimed.

"Rodman, oh! Rodman, in pity's name, do not speak thus!" tremulously besought Daisy. "I have never done you harm; I have been loyal to you."

"So was Judas loyal!" bitterly declared Stacey.

"Hear me!"

"I will not hear you! This is not a time for idle words. I have waited for you, but not to talk. Something else is on my mind, and you shall learn what it is. We had a sure thing on Paulus Andrews, and chance to make ourselves rich forever, but you ruined all. With the future as fair as man and woman could wish, riches galore seemed in our reach. The riches were there, but you had to go and sell out to the enemy. I know not the power that led you to do this, but certain it is you have betrayed me to my foes—"

"Rodman, I have not! I swear to you—"

"And now all is lost. What good has the death of Paulus Andrews done? What shall we reap in the way of riches? Nothing, for the jig is up with us. Old Harry Hawk is on our trail like a bloodhound, and there is but one way to escape him. That way is in flight, and I shall act accordingly. This night I leave New York,

but I go a beggar, almost, because you have betrayed me."

"No, no! I have not—"

"But before I go, I say you shall reap as you have sown. I will give up the money, because I can't take it, but revenge shall be mine."

"Rodman, hear me!" gasped Daisy.

"This is my answer!"

Stacey was frantic with rage, and the deadly purpose he had formed before her coming was carried out with relentless vehemence. His hand was swung up; it fell with a knife glittering in the hand; the weapon found a sheath in human flesh, and then, with a faint cry, Daisy fell to the floor.

"Murder!" had been her whisper.

Stacey heard; he saw what he had done; his courage failed him; he turned and fled wildly from the room, his face toward the street.

CHAPTER XXXV.

AMONG THE THUGS.

OLD HARRY HAWK and his companions had received an unpleasant shock when they found quiet retreat thus cut off by the unknown men in the hall, and they were not reassured by the cry of the leader of the party.

"Down with them!" he repeated, hurriedly, and each of the opposing force drew a revolver.

"The jig is up!" exclaimed the unknown sailor who had tried to guide Old Harry and Bronson out.

Essex had seen a good deal of wild life, and he showed coolness, now, which surprised all. He came to the front with a peremptory command:

"Keep those revolvers where they belong, or you will get hurt! Who are you, and why do you seek to oppose our departure?"

The strangers looked at each other as if each would shift the responsibility of the reply. The fact was, they had been ordered to attack without any waste of words, but they had been checked without exactly knowing why, and it was not easy to get into line.

"What right have you to bar our way?" pursued Essex.

"What biz have you ter be here, anyhow?" growled one of the foe.

"We are going to the street."

"Sure?"

"I am quite sure of it, and the man who tries to oppose us will come to grief."

The natural mood of the party was returning, and the spokesman burst into a laugh in which his companions joined heartily. They seemed to see something very funny in the bold stand of the weaker force.

"Do you hear that, fellers?" asked one of them, as their mirth subsided. "He really thinks he kin do somethin' handsome."

"He's a cuckoo, he is."

"Got a wheel in his head I should say."

"Clean gone."

"We waste time," put in a new speaker.

"Wind this up, boys!"

It was an order that the detective's party had been expecting, but the delay had given them time to think. With so many in front of them it was plain they would find it next to impossible to force their way, and another fact led them to see that it would be wise to retreat. Among the sailors in the dance-hall there must be some who were honest.

Reasoning thus, Bronson gave the order: "Fall back!"

They began to move, and then those in front laughed heartily. The apparently untimely mirth gave the fugitives an idea—they looked quickly, and made an alarming discovery. Men were behind as well as in front of them. They were hemmed in fully.

"Seize the critters!" cried a commanding voice.

There was a general rush.

"Back to the wall!" shouted the sailor who had been with Essex and Old Harry.

The fight began at once. Somehow, nobody seemed to care to set the example of using revolvers—the detective and his allies did not, surely, with the odds so much against them—and in the headlong attack of the enemy it was each man for himself with fists and hands for his weapons.

Blows were given and received, and the party surged back and forth in wildest confusion.

It was the desire of Old Harry and Bronson to force their way through and gain the street, but they found such a solid wall of men opposed to them that it could not be done. The struggle was against odds, and they were seeing what such a thing meant.

Suddenly the solitary light went out.

"Just our chance!" shouted the friendly sailor.

"Cut your way through the scurvy scamps!"

Essex knew this was good advice. To miss the chance was to lose all, perhaps, and he cried in Old Harry's ear:

"We must go through! Fight hard!"

"I am with you, my huckleberry!"

The detective answered with surprising cheerfulness, but it was the last word they had opportunity to exchange. The forward movement was made, and that was the end of united action. Essex found himself hemmed in by foes, and

with blows falling heavily upon him he staggered on for some paces and then was struck by the full weight of a man and thrown to the floor.

His head encountered the boards, and his mind received a corresponding shock. Still, he had one idea uppermost in his mind, and he staggered blindly to his feet.

Which way was he to go?

Where were the other men?

It seemed to him he had been down but a second, yet he could not now hear the least sound. The fight seemed to have died away, and in its place silence had come. Singular fact! Where had all gone to?

"I must get out," he thought again. "Old Harry may have gone, but if he has not, there is all the more need that I should go. I must call the police here."

He felt his way in the profound darkness, and finally found a door. He opened it. Then he stopped to see what was beyond. His head was still whirling strangely, but, though he could see no light, he felt the touch of wind, and that seemed to promise something.

He moved on.

Slam!

The door closed behind him. He did not like that, but he let it go, and once more advanced. Within five minutes he had made discoveries which did not please him.

He was in a sort of entry, and it had but one door. This door had closed, as before stated, and he could not reopen it. From the entry there was but one other way out—that was a parody on a window which led to the dancing-hall, and as he stood in the smaller room he could look into the larger one and see the drinking men by the tables, and the dancers just beyond.

Nobody there seemed to have been alarmed, or to care for what might occur around them. Was there an honest man among them? The question was important, for he was still in the lair of his foes.

Everybody appeared to be interested only in himself, and, as Essex's head was still swimming, he took position close to the sashless window, or, more properly, hole in the wall, and watched and listened.

He was not to be obliged to give much time to observing those who were of trivial interest, for matters of more import soon came to the front. Close to him were two persons in sailor costume, and though the color on their cheeks was unusually deep even for sailors, he did not suspect they were anything else until they began to speak.

"I don't see where he got to," remarked one.

"Don't you remember that Tom said he saw him sailing down the street?"

"Yes, but how did he get out?"

"We were all mixed up in the fight."

"If Bronson is gone, there will be police down on us."

"Let them come!"

"I don't say so."

"Remember the secret hiding-place."

"I do remember it, and I get great satisfaction from it. A rare feature of the place it is. I am told that this dance-house has been under suspicion many a time, and detectives have been sent here, but nothing has ever been found out against it except that it is a place where Jack Tar is fleeced by cormorants."

"You ought to know, with your experience as a detective."

"Hush! Not so loud!"

The warning had come too late. Essex Bronson had heard all, and his eyes and ears had served him well. The "sailors" were Wageline and Stacey, in disguise.

The man in hiding had grown alert, and if his head was not yet perfectly clear, he was awake to the situation. If there had been any doubt as to the origin of the recent attack there was no longer doubt, and he wished Old Harry Hawk was there.

The detective was absent, however, and Essex did not know whether he was living or dead, or, if alive, whether he was a prisoner or free.

Could he learn more from his companions? He continued to listen.

"Don't be alarmed," answered Stacey, to the last warning from Tony. "I am even more anxious than you to escape detection."

"How can you be?" asked Wageline. "I am a detective, and in this den. Suppose men knew me as I am?"

"What if they knew me as I am?" quickly returned Stacey.

"Could they get anything very serious on you?"

"Could they? Man, they could swing me!" Stacey feverishly exclaimed.

"Why, you have always declared that you did not kill Andrews."

"Is he the only person in the world?"

"I don't understand."

"Do you see the disguise I am in? It was not put on for fun, nor simply to aid Babe Brazier in decoying Bronson and Hawk. There was a reason why I want to be free from the sight of my fellow-men, and it is because I am hunted!"

"Hunted?" echoed Wageline, wonderingly.

"Hush! hush!"

Stacey looked around nervously, and then lowered his voice and added:

"Wageline, I am trying to be calm, but it's a stupendous task. My nerves are all aquiver, and upon me is a great horror!"

CHAPTER XXXVI.

A SERIES OF SURPRISES.

ESSEX BRONSON was perplexed. If Stacey's words were striking they were not more so than his manner, and he was led to wonder what had occurred to make the usually cool man start at every sound, and apparently see danger in everything.

Wageline was equally perplexed.

"I don't understand what you are driving at, Rod," he replied. "Is there some crime on your conscience of which I know nothing?"

Stacey evidently remembered he was talking with a detective, and one who was in the habit of selling out to the highest bidder. He replied guardedly:

"I suppose you will call it weakness on my part, but this thing has upset me wholly. Despite the fact that you are my friend, I am all the while in peril. You are not the whole police force of New York. I know not when others may descend on me. Isn't that enough to alarm me?"

The slightest possible smile flitted across Wageline's face. He was not deceived by the plausible excuse. Still, he was not disposed to make light of the affair, or feel happy himself.

"We wade in deep waters," he admitted.

"Unless we can shut off Old Harry Hawk permanently, there is trouble ahead. Let him spring his mine and I am sure to go down in the rapids."

"Fool that I am!" exclaimed Stacey, bitterly.

"Why?"

"To be in this trouble."

"It's your own game."

"I am well aware of it, and that is why I am a fool. I had a good thing, but I was not satisfied. I had to go and play for big stakes, and this is the result of it all."

"But if you are innocent—"

"Man, don't you know the innocent sometimes suffer?"

Essex Bronson smiled. Despite the elaborations of all who had been parties to the decoying of Paulus Andrews, he was at that moment of the opinion that Rodman could tell more than he had admitted of how the man died.

"Well, let us attend only to business," replied Wageline. "The waters roll darkly around us, and we must find a life-boat to save ourselves. We have Old Harry a prisoner, and if we can find Bronson—"

"Creak!"

Essex started. The sound had been near him, and, as he hurriedly turned his head, he saw there was more than noise to be afraid of.

The door had opened, and two men stood before him.

They were Babe Brazier and Tim O'Killen!

"By gar!"

The exclamation came from Babe, and was one expressive of stupid surprise. Evidently he was taken all aback by the discovery, and that by it a matter-of-fact movement had been turned into one of importance.

Bronson's head had regained enough of its usual clearness for him to see that the time was one for action. Not only were Babe and Tim there, but Wageline and Stacey were almost as near. To delay would be fatal to his hopes. He did not delay.

All of his strength was gathered for action.

He made a wild rush to pass the men.

He struck Babe like a cyclone and knocked him over like a ten-pin.

His foot was on the threshold, and he seemed likely to go ahead victoriously, but Tim had not gone to sleep. The big tough reached out and seized Bronson in a tenacious hold.

"I've got ye!" he cried, exultantly.

Essex struck out gamely and his fist took the fellow on the jaw. Tim's head went flying against the wall under the shock, but nothing short of knocking it completely off his body seemed capable of affecting him seriously.

"Dat was a love-pat!" he exclaimed.

Essex was not there to give "love-pats," and he rained blow after blow upon his enemy, but Tim withstood them all without emotion. His face was like iron, if appearances went for anything.

Babe had received a heavy fall, but he was up now, and he came to his feet with rage acting as a spur upon him. He, too, grasped the single fighter, and Bronson had two muscular men opposed to him. Their united efforts were not enough to subdue him, and he was still making a gallant struggle when Wageline and Stacey appeared on the scene.

It did not take them long to see how matters stood, and they gave their aid. Thus beset, Essex was speedily secured, and the fight ended.

"By gar!" muttered Babe, caressing divers injuries, "that was a rusty scrap. The feller is a demon. Why, he could lick Tim an' me all alone."

The evidence pointed that way, but Tim was not ready to admit it.

"Not much!" he exclaimed. "I could whip him all alone, an' wid one hand tied behind me. See?"

Wageline was the cool member of the party.

"Hustle him away," he directed. "This dance-house is noted for scraps, but there may be men in the other room who would fall on us if they knew all. Take him to where his fellows are."

Bronson was hurried away through a passage.

"Well," spoke Babe, with a sneer, "be you satisfied with this, you meddlin' fool? Couldn't keep out o' mischief nohow, could ye? You shall see w'ot it leads ter, by gar! We have yer pal, Old Harry, an' the other chap, an' yer shall go wid them. Come along!"

Essex knew the folly of resistance, and he made none.

"Take plenty of rope while you can," he retorted. "Your day is drawing to an end."

"Yours will come first."

"I take it you are the men who decoyed us here?"

"We be, critter. We sent a bogus letter, an' I guess et jest about did its work. Anyhow, you're here. See?"

"We need not argue that point."

"I should say not, mister. Oh! here we be."

They had reached another door, and Babe produced a key and began to unlock it. A grin expanded his face.

"Walk in an' see your cherubs!" he cried.

He swung the door back. They entered.

Essex at once saw other men, and he recognized them easily. They were Old Harry and the friendly sailor.

There was more to be seen, however, and the rest was anything but pleasant to the crooks. They had left Old Harry and the sailor alone in the room, but securely bound. Now, both men were free, and there was a third person with them. This person was Chimmie Dunn.

No explanation was necessary for this scene. There was an open window at the rear, and it was plain that the irrepressible street-boy had been busy.

"By gar!" exclaimed Babe, dumfounded.

"What is this?" demanded Wageline, sharply.

"I suspect part of it is me!" retorted Chimmie. "Tony, ol' fel, how be you, anyhow? I've come in ter see yer menagerie. Trot out yer three-headed cow an' seven-tailed pig, fer freaks is jest my size. See?"

Chimmie was jovial, but nobody else was. Everybody realized that trouble was at hand. It would have been precipitated by the detective and his aids, but they had no arms.

"Treachery!" gasped Babe Brazier.

"The kid has done it!" grated Tim.

"We still have them," put in Tony.

"Drop on them!"

"Gents, do yer prettiest now, or we won't never eat hash again, by gum!"

With this exclamation Chimmie flashed across the floor. He was light-footed as a cat, and he reached his objective point with one wild rush. When he arrived there something happened.

Lowering his head he butted Tony in the stomach, and the crook detective fell with a crash.

"Wade in!" was the boy's cheerful cry.

With such a valiant example the men would have been stupid not to do their duty. Old Harry, Essex and the sailor precipitated themselves upon the foe with zeal.

"Smash in their binnacle lights!" roared the sailor.

It was one thing to plan and another to do, but they tried to make a record. The three adults attacked the enemy at once, and if Chimmie was not found at any one especial point, it was noticeable that he was everywhere, and every time Babe's party gained an advantage the boy was sure to upset it by a well-timed assault.

Back and forth struggled the contestants, and the tough resort had rarely witnessed a warmer encounter.

"Ho! ho!" cried Old Harry, "this is our day now! Wipe them off the face of the earth!"

"Cut them in two amidships!" added Jack Tar.

"Smash 'em in the jaw!" echoed Chimmie, seeking his own sphere of life for an illustration.

Essex was silent, but he tried to do his part, and his life in wild foreign lands fitted him well for it. Chance brought him once more in contact with Tim O'Killen, and that person essayed to prove himself the better man. He thrashed the air wildly in an effort to strike his opponent, but it was brute force opposed to science, and Tim was felled like an ox in the shambles.

"Look out!" shouted Chimmie, just then.

They did look, and the sight was startling. Other men were pouring into the room—Tony's crowd had reinforcements!

CHAPTER XXXVII.

THE CRISIS ARRIVES.

ESSEX BRONSON was not slow to see the danger of this new diversion.

"Men!" he cried, to his own followers, "there

is but one chance. Cut your way through. Now, side by side!"

Desperation gave them strength, and the rush was made with the gallant force side by side, as planned. It was a whirlwind attack, and it succeeded better than was to be expected. The former opponents had been avoided, and the new-comers were taken by surprise, in a measure.

Before they realized the situation the smaller force had swept through their midst and were in the hall outside.

"This way!" exclaimed Chimmie Dunn. "Foller me, an' I'll guide you ter safety. Jest come on; that's all!"

The pursuit was on, but with nobody in front it did no harm. Rapid work for a time took the fugitives to the street, and when they saw the light of the city lamps it was a welcome sight.

"Git out o' this section like a Guttentbug racer!" advised Chimmie. "Jest make yer legs paddle, fellers!"

Nobody rejected the advice, and when the foe reached the door they were so well away that the danger was over. The fight was ended, and so was the pursuit.

"Now ter rally the perleece an' gobble 'em!" pursued Chimmie, excitedly.

"Let them go for now," advised Old Harry.

"Oh! come off!" groaned Chimmie. "I say, take yer fun when ye can git it, by gum!"

"I've got enough!" declared the sailor. "No more to-night for me. Still, we have been companions in this set-to, and I'd like to meet you all to-morrow. Where shall it be?"

"John Maines's house," suggested Chimmie, quickly.

The idea did not impress the others unfavorably, and the sailor was told where the house was. Then he hurried away, and the three old allies were left to themselves. The detective was in deep thought.

"It will be well," he finally remarked, "to make the meeting a general one. I wish to see all who have been in this case, and that includes not only us three, but Minola. Once together, we must compare notes, see if the evidence is strong enough to sail in, and then act accordingly. We must seize our men quickly, or they will take to flight. It must now be clear to them that their game is played."

"Unless they make a bold push to head us off."

"We will not give them much time to do that. After the interview in the morning it will be our plan to strike."

"Then let us meet early. I will get word to Miss Alden, and we can all be at John Maines's before the foe will have much opportunity to do damage."

The next day Minola Alden entered the Maines house. She found Old Harry, Essex, Chimmie, Lil and Mr. Maines already there.

"Have I kept you waiting?" she asked.

"We have but just gathered," returned Bronson.

"I should have been with you earlier, but, as I came along, I believed I was followed, and I took more time."

"Were you followed?" interrupted Old Harry, quickly.

"I don't know. There were men who seemed to me to be doing this, but when I tried to catch them positively, they disappeared."

"I would like to know how this is, before we proceed," declared Old Harry, and he rose and went to the window.

He had barely reached that point when the hall door opened without ceremony, and several men walked into the room. Old Harry wheeled quickly, and one glance was enough to tell him a good deal.

Tony Wageline was at the head of the intruders, and Rodman Stacey was close behind him, but that it was not to be another violent demonstration, was made plain by the presence of the other men. Some of them were strangers to Old Harry, and several he knew to be reputable officers of law.

The expected counter-stroke had surely come; Wageline had resolved upon a bold push and acted accordingly.

"This means fight!" muttered Old Harry.

The intruders had paused, but Wageline lost but little time. He pointed to Essex Bronson and exclaimed:

"That's your man!"

A second officer moved forward.

"Essex Bronson," he spoke, deliberately, "you are our prisoner!"

"Who are you?" retorted Bronson.

"We are detectives, and we charge you with being the assassin of Paulus Andrews, lately killed."

The explanation was not so telling as it would have been had it fallen unexpectedly, and Essex's retort was quick:

"Are you my accuser?"

"No. It is Mr. Wageline who has worked the case up, and he is the accuser, as you term it."

"Don't you feel proud," cried Essex, "to train in company with him?"

"Heed not this rant," coolly interrupted Tony. "The proof is clear and complete. He

is more than a murderer, too; he and this woman"—pointing to Minola—"have blackmailed Mr. Stacey here, accusing him of crime. It's a fine nest of villainy, with that scoundrel, Old Harry Hawk, as an accessory to all."

"Ho! ho!" exclaimed Old Harry, "you will find it hard to prove it. You are playing a desperate game, Wageline, and it's your last and weakest card. You'll lose on the venture, Wageline."

"Give them no more time to make words!" commanded Tony. "Take them away. Drag them to prison!"

"We have something to say to that!" cried Essex. "Do you think we will yield to you meekly, sir? Never, never! You are forcing the fight, and you shall have your fill. You will see—"

"Take them off!" repeated Tony, sharply.

"Stop a bit before you haul up your anchor!"

The words came from the door, and, as the adventurers of the previous night looked that way, they saw there the sailor who had been in the fight at the dance-house.

"Hold hard!" he added. "I've harked a bit to your blarney, and it seems to me I belong in this discussion. So Essex Bronson killed the old man at Babe Brazer's, did he? Well, if he did, the North Star is in the South, and the compass is good only to play marbles on. Them is my sentiments, and my name is—"

"What have you got to do about it?" thundered Tony.

"Just this, old man: I was at Babe's the night Paulus Andrews was killed, and I saw the deed done. My name is Eben Jones, and—"

"Eben Jones!" cried Old Harry.

"Just so; and son of Peleg and Priscilla Jones, of Skowhegan, Maine; an honest family as ever—"

Old Harry hurriedly crossed the floor and seized the arm of the sailor.

"Are you one of the two men who were at Brazer's, the night of the murder?" he demanded.

"Messmate, I am."

"Why have you not made yourself known before?"

"You land sharks have an institution called the House of Detention, that don't suit Jack Tar. Sam Lock and I have laid low, and we intended to let you landmen settle the jig all by yourselves; but, bless me! when that shark there goes to accusing others, it's time for me to softly sound my hullabaloo."

Eben was as calm as so much ice, but Tony was growing desperate.

"This is a plot—"

So he began, but Old Harry cut him short.

"Sailor, you say you saw the murder done. Who did it?"

"There's the fellow!"

Eben's finger was leveled at Rodman Stacey, and that man grew pallid with fear.

"It is a lie!" he gasped.

"No lie about it, old man. You did the job with a piece of iron you took along after the man Andrews had escaped from Brazer's house. You've played sly on it, no doubt, for you hit Andrews unseen by Brazer, Tim O'Killen and the woman, though they were hunting for Andrews with you; but you did the job—"

"This is incoherent!" shouted Tony Wageline, himself pale. "We will not listen; the man is drunk!"

"Say that ag'in," roared Eben, "and out go your lights, sure!"

"I demand the arrest of Stacey and Wageline!" cried Old Harry.

"And I demand the arrest of those we came to arrest," thundered Tony. "Will you be influenced by these lies?"

The men who had had no part in the case until that day were so bewildered that they did not know what to do. Ordinarily, they would have taken all the counter-accusations to be a trick of the accused, but they did not have abundant faith in Tony Wageline, and they were not so ready to ignore all that was against him.

Rodman Stacey was desperate. He had reason to dread having Sailor Eben tell all he could, and the plotter was meditating trying to hide one crime with another.

His hand was on a concealed revolver. Would it do to use it and stop Eben's tongue forever? Would the law call such a step self-defense or murder?

In a calmer mood he would not have been at fault to answer the question, but, now, he could not think clearly.

While he hesitated there was still another arrival. Some subtle thing warned Rodman. He looked up; Daisy was there.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

THE WAGES OF CRIME.

SILENCE fell upon the party. Every eye had unconsciously turned to the new-comer. They saw a woman who was pale as the dead, and who was supporting herself with an effort. Daisy it was, as Rodman Stacey had quickly discovered, but she looked so ghostly that her appearance told a pitiful tale.

Old Harry was quick to see that something might come of this, and, as he noticed Stacey's hand in his pocket, he moved closer to the cornered assassin.

Daisy, wounded, weak, and, she believed, dying, had come there solely to see Lil once more, and was surprised at the sight which greeted her vision. Quickly, however, her gaze turned upon Rodman, and then the stillness was full of power.

Stacey aroused. He had hoped she was dead, but, seeing her alive, he saw, also, how close he was to the whirlpool. He jerked out his revolver with a bitter cry:

"Die, traitress, die!"

Old Harry leaped upon him like a panther and wrested the weapon away easily.

"If there is a man here who has regard for law," he exclaimed, "I demand that these wretches be prevented from doing damage."

One of the stranger detectives interrupted commandingly.

"I will take charge here, and all shall have a chance. I want to know who is to be arrested, and it can only be explained to me by the stories of all."

"You are not authorized to try a case," remonstrated Wageline.

"I care not what I am authorized to do. You insisted that I come here, and I am going to give all their due. Men, let nobody leave here, but unite with me in having all talk."

"Give your first attention here."

The speaker was Minola, and she moved to the side of Daisy just in time to catch her as she tottered.

Room was made for the wounded woman on a lounge, and then the leading detective took things in hand.

"I've heard one side of the story," he said, "and now I want to listen to the other. Old Harry Hawk, what have you to say?"

"I accuse Rodman Stacey of having lured Paulus Andrews to the resort of one Babe Brazer, with the intention of killing him, and there"—pointing to Eben Jones—"is my witness that he did kill him."

Rodman loudly protested against the introduction of this evidence, but he was silenced, and Eben was called upon for his story.

"I'm a rolling sea-dog," began Eben, "and when I'm on shore I have to put up at somebody's boarding-house. I tried Babe Brazer's lately, and thereby hangs this tale."

"I had Sam Lock, my messmate, along with me, and we were in the den playing cards that evening. We got onto the fact that there was something unusual going on, and we trotted out to see the fun."

"We got our eyes on Babe, Tim O'Killen, and that man and woman."

He pointed to Stacey and Daisy.

"Go on!"

"It seems they had lured somebody there to do him up, but he had escaped them. It seems he played drunk on them, or, rather, he was drunk, but not so much so but that he got onto their game and skipped to the house-tops, which are flat."

"They were about to pursue, and I suggested that we go along—Sam Lock and me. Of course we had played light, and Babe and his crowd did not suspect we were around, or knew of their work."

"Out they went to the roof. Sam and I follored. There was a long chase, but this man"—pointing to Stacey—"finally found the fugitive, and he struck him down with an iron he carried, and left him on a house-top, dead."

"Then this man went it light. He didn't tell his partners of the deed he had done, but agreed with them that the fugitive had escaped, and all went back into Babe's ranch."

"Sam Lock and I still kept out of sight. We had seen murder done, but we did not want to get mixed up in it. We stayed the night out at Babe's, but skipped when the day dawned."

"That's all, but I will swear the killing took place on the house where Paulus Andrews was found, and that this man was the one who did it. Stacey, his name is, and he killed Andrews."

To Old Harry Hawk, Essex and Minola much was made plain. Daisy, Babe and Tim had all along declared, even in private, that they had lost sight of Paulus wholly, the night of the crime, but the riddle was solved at last.

Paulus had retreated to the roofs, but not further; he had then escaped all but Stacey, but that man had found and slain him, and then craftily concealed the fact even from his allies.

The mystery was solved.

When Eben was done Stacey had something to say, and he stoutly denied that he had even been at Babe Brazer's the night of the murder. Right there he made a mistake. When he drove his knife into Daisy's side he had done more than sever flesh—he had cut the cord of love which bound her to him. She had something to say now, and she was given chance to say it.

"All that the sailor has told is true, unless it is the alleged fact that Rodman Stacey killed Paulus Andrews—of that, I know nothing."

"Stacey was partner with Andrews in an invention gotten up by the latter. Stacey habitually cheated Andrews, and he planned to rob him of all. When milder measures had failed, it was

his plot to kill him. Andrews was lured to Babe Brazer's. He was to be killed there, but he was not so much intoxicated as we thought him. He escaped to the house-tops. We followed him there—Stacey, Brazer, Tim O'Killen and myself; but he was found only by Stacey, it seems."

Old Harry Hawk, Essex and Minola had something to say, and when their stories put Wageline on the rack, Daisy again came into the case.

She plainly declared that when Wageline struck the trail at the beginning of the murder case he had come to Stacey and offered to drop it, if Stacey would pay him. The chance to pay a bribe had been accepted, and the bribe had been taken by Wageline.

Matters were growing very warm for the conspirators, but Tony put on a bold front and declared he would prove his innocence in court.

It was necessary to arrange in some way for the future, and this the men of the party proceeded to do. Leaving them to themselves, Minola took Daisy and Lil into the other room.

Minola felt deeply for Daisy, and she expressed her feelings in appropriate words.

"Do not mind me," replied the adventuress; "I am not worthy of it. I have lived a life of crime; do not pity such a person."

"You are still a woman, and, as such, I give you my full sympathy."

Daisy's eyes filled with tears, but she made no reply. Instead, she turned to Lil. She looked until Lil moved uneasily.

"Don't!" she requested. "You make me feel creepy!"

"Child," the woman added, "do you know why I came here?"

"No."

"I am your own aunt."

"What?"

"Your mother was my sister. Do not look so surprised; it is true. Since you told me your story I have investigated, and I found all of my suspicions confirmed. You believed your parents to be Peter and Bridget Lawson. This was wrong."

"But I lived with them," exclaimed Lil.

"It was one phase of your life as a waif. Your real parents died; you were taken by the Lawsons; and as your earliest recollections go back to them, only, you have thought them your parents. They were not. Your father was Warren Gray; your mother, before her marriage, was Mary Perkins. She was my sister, for my real name is Eunice Perkins. Do you see now why I have been drawn to you? I saw the resemblance you bore to both of your parents: I recognized you from the first. Yes, and my heart went out to you, despite the fact that my own life has been so evil. For my sister was good, and you were her child."

"Ho! ho! I can tell something about that!" cried a voice at the door, and, looking, they saw Old Harry Hawk.

"What can you tell?"

"Simply that I do not think Miss Lil will remain in poverty a great while."

"Why not?"

"You call her father Warren Gray. It was the name by which he was known, but not his real one. He was born Warren Gray Andrews, and he was the son of Paulus Andrews."

"What?" cried Minola.

"Fact!" declared Old Harry. "I know whereof I speak. Poor Paulus was always a hard drinker, and, when Warren was still young, he resolved to get away from the family disgrace. He took the name of Warren Gray, and it is easy to believe he never told you he had any other name."

"Who are you that knows so much about it?" asked Daisy, doubtfully.

Old Harry straightened himself, and the reply came swiftly:

"I am Marcus Andrews, and Paulus Andrews was my brother!"

"Impossible!"

"No. Don't you see the bad family blood in me? I have been a weak and careless fool in my way, and my only good deed was that I masked myself under a false name. I have called myself Old Harry Hawk, but I am the brother of Paulus Andrews, and the uncle of Warren Gray, so called."

Nobody was capable of making answer, and the detective went on:

"Like you, I early saw the resemblance this child bore to my nephew, and it has done much to rouse the better part of my dwarfed nature. Another thing was needed to rouse me, and it came. In the early part of this detective case I had nothing to do, and, as I understood the name of the dead man to be Paul Anderson, I did not suspect he had been my brother until I saw his face in the undertaker's shop. Then the whole truth flashed upon me. Manhood was revived, thank Heaven! and I took up the case with heart and good will."

With hardly a stop the speaker turned to Lil the Lamplighter.

"Child, you will probably inherit money when Paulus Andrews's estate is settled. Whether you do or not, remember one fact. I was once Tony Wageline's tool, but now I am a man, and in me you will always find a friend and defender. You are my nephew's daughter—you shall be all to me that blood can be, and to

you I will be all that honesty and earnest purpose can accomplish. I am no longer Old Harry Hawk; I am a man!"

Time works changes. How has it been with those we have known in these pages?

A fever carried Rodman Stacey to his grave before he could be executed for killing Andrews, though not until he was condemned. Things went hard with Tony Wageline, and, to escape deserved punishment, he committed suicide. Babe Brazer, Tim O'Killen and Dusty Dan received due terms in Sing Sing. All the charges against these men were fully established.

A handsome sum of money fell to Paulus Andrews's heiress—and it was Lil who received all, for her rights were proved beyond doubt.

Daisy did not die of her wound. She recovered fully, remained to rejoice in her niece's good fortune, and then disappeared from view. She left a note in which she said she was not worthy to mingle with those like Lil, but that, in another part of the country, she would from that time lead an upright life.

Eben Jones and Sam Lock remain sailors of the sea.

Chimmie Dunn was in doubt as to whether he rejoiced in Lil's leap to affluence or not, but she assured him she will never be less his friend, so he peddles suspenders with a stout heart and looks forward to the future.

Old Harry Hawk received much credit for bringing the gang to justice, but it was his last case. He had saved money, and, with this, he retired to private life.

His eccentricities did not all die out, but all who knew him respected him highly, and he deserves all their good will.

Hannah Carter still washes for a living. When she told Bronson that the daughter of Eunice Perkins's sister had been a boy, and had died, she put him at fault, but it was, on her part, only a lapse of memory.

Of course Lillian no longer lights streets lamps. Instead, she lives comfortably with her guardians, Mr. and Mrs. Essex Bronson. And who is Mrs. Bronson? We have known her as Minola Alden, but she has said good-bye to professional work. As Essex's wife she has found the same happiness her presence has bestowed upon Bronson.

THE END.

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- 698 Thad Burr, the Invincible; or, The "L" Clue.
- 690 The Matchless Detective.
- 680 XX, the Fatal Clew; or, Burr's Master Case.

BY MAJOR DANGERFIELD BURR.

- 448 Hark Kenton, the Traitor.
- 188 The Phantom Mazeppa; or, The Hyena.
- 156 Velvet Face, the Border Bravo.
- 142 Captain Crimson, the Man of the Iron Face.
- 117 Buffalo Bill's Strange Pard; or, Dashing Dandy.

BY WILLIAM H. MANNING.

- 790 Plunger Pete, the Race Track Detective.
- 774 Steve Starr, the Dock Detective.
- 764 The New York Sharp's Shadower.
- 738 Detective Claxton, the Record Breaker.
- 714 Gabe Gall, the Gambolier from Great Hump.
- 703 Spokane Saul, the Samaritan Suspect.
- 692 Dead Shot Paul, the Deep-Range Explorer.
- 655 Strawberry Sam, the Man with the Birthmark.
- 646 Dark John, the Grim Guard.
- 638 Murdock, the Dread Detective.
- 623 Dangerous Dave, the Never-Beaten Detective.
- 611 Alkali Abe, the Game Chicken from Texas.
- 596 Rustler Rube; the Round-Up Detective.
- 585 Dan Dixon's Double.
- 575 Steady Hand, the Napoleon of Detectives.
- 563 Wyoming Zeke, the Hotspur of Honey-suckle.
- 551 Garry Kean, the Man with Backbone.
- 539 Old Doubledark, the Wily Detective.
- 531 Saddle-Chief Kit, the Prairie Centaur.
- 521 Paradise Sam, the Nor'-West Pilot.
- 513 Texas Tartar, the Man With Nine Lives.
- 506 Uncle Honest, the Peacemaker of Hornets' Nest.
- 498 Central Pacific Pa'l, the Mail Train Spy.
- 492 Border Bullet, the Prairie Sharpshooter.
- 486 Kansas Kitten, the Northwest Detective.
- 479 Gladiator Gabe, the Samson of Sassajack.
- 470 The Duke of Dakota.
- 463 Gold Gauntlet, the Gulch Gladiator.
- 455 Yank Yellowbird, the Tall Hustler of the Hills.
- 449 Bluff Burke, King of the Rockies.
- 442 Wild West Walt, the Mountain Veteran.
- 437 Deep Duke; or, The Man of Two Lives.
- 427 The Rivals of Montana Mill.
- 415 Hot Heart, the Detective Spy.
- 405 Old Baldy, the Brigadier of Buck Basin.
- 385 Wild Dick Turpin, the Leadville Lion.
- 297 Colorado Rube, the Strong Arm of Hotspur.
- 279 The Gold Dragoon, or, California Bloodhound.

BUFFALO BILL NOVELS.

By Colonel Prentiss Ingraham.

- 794 Buffalo Bill's Winning Hand.
- 787 Buffalo Bill's Dead Shot.
- 781 Buffalo Bill's Brand.
- 777 Buffalo Bill's Spy Shadower.
- 769 Buffalo Bill's Sweepstake.
- 765 Buffalo Bill's Dozen; or, Silk Ribbon Sam.
- 761 Buffalo Bill's Mascot.
- 757 Buffalo Bill's Double.
- 750 Buffalo Bill's Big Four.
- 743 Buffalo Bill's Flush Hand.
- 739 Buffalo Bill's Blind; or, The Masked Driver.
- 735 Buffalo Bill and His Merry Men.
- 731 Buffalo Bill's Beagies; or, Silk Lasso Sam.
- 727 Buffalo Bill's Body Guard.
- 722 Buffalo Bill on the War-path.
- 716 Buffalo Bill's Scout Shadowers.
- 710 Buffalo Bill Baffled; or, The Deserter Desperado.
- 697 Buffalo Bill's Buckskin Brotherhood.
- 691 Buffalo Bill's Blind Trail; or, Mustang Madge.
- 667 Buffalo Bill's Swoop; or, The King of the Mines.
- 649 Buffalo Bill's Chief of Cowboys; or, Buck Taylor.
- 644 Buffalo Bill's Bonanza; or, Silver Circle Knights.
- 362 Buffalo Bill's Grip; or, Oath Bound to Custer.
- 329 Buffalo Bill's Pledge; or, The League of Three.
- 189 Buffalo Bill's Gold Trail; or, The Desperate Dozen.
- 175 Wild Bill's Trump Card; or, The Indian Heiress.
- 168 Wild Bill, the Pistol Dead Shot.

By Buffalo Bill.

- 800 Wild Bill, the Dead Center Shot.
- 639 Buffalo Bill's Gold King.
- 599 The Dead Shot Nine; or, My Pards of the Plains.
- 414 Red Renard, the Indian Detective.
- 401 One-Armed Pard; or, Borderland Retribution.
- 397 The Wizard Brothers; or, White Beaver's Trail.
- 394 White Beaver, the Exile of the Platte.
- 319 Wild Bill, the Whirlwind of the West.
- 304 Texas Jack, the Prairie Rattler.
- 243 The Pilgrim Sharp; or, The Soldier's Sweetheart.
- 83 Gold Bullet Sport; or, Knights of the Overland.
- 53 Death-Tracker, the Chief of Scouts.

By Leon Lewis, Ned Buntline, etc.

- 773 Buffalo Bill's Ban; or, Cody to the Rescue.
- 682 Buffalo Bill's Secret Service Trail.
- 629 Buffalo Bill's Daring Role; or, Daredeath Dick.
- 517 Buffalo Bill's First Trail; or, The Express Rider.
- 153 Buffalo Bill, Chief of Scouts.
- 117 Buffalo Bill's Strange Pard; or, Dashing Dandy.
- 92 Buffalo Bill, the Buckskin King.

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